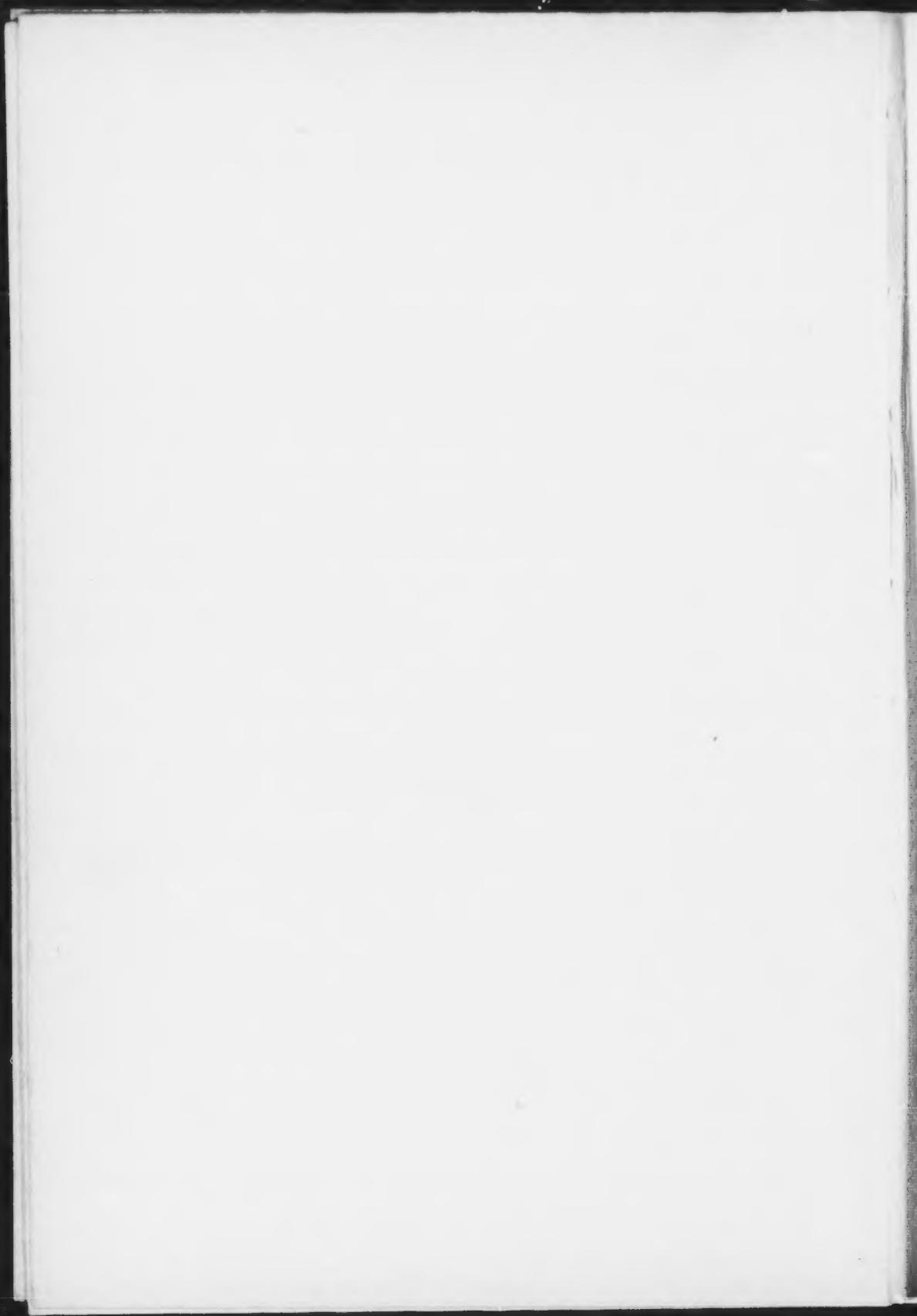


THE STARS INCLINE



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BY

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CHAPTER I

ONE can be nineteen and still know a great deal of the world. Ruth Mayfield felt that she knew a great deal of the world. She could judge character, and taking care of Mother's business affairs had helped a lot, and like most young women of nineteen she knew that if marriage offered no more to her than it had offered to her parents, she did not want to marry. Of course they hadn't quarrelled or anything, but they lived such dull lives, and there were always money worries—and everything.

Ruth had never told her mother any of these things, especially after her father died and her mother had cried so much and had seemed to feel even worse than Ruth did, for Ruth *had* felt badly. She had been awfully fond of her father, really fonder of him than of her mother. He understood her better and it was he who had encouraged her to study art.

That was one of the things that set her apart from other girls in Indianapolis. She was an art

student. One day she would do great things, she knew.

When she was a very little girl she had intended to write. She decided this because nothing gave her so much pleasure as reading, not the sort of books that delight the hours of the average childhood, but books which, had her mother ever taken the trouble to look at them, would have made her rather concerned for the future of the small reader. But Mrs. Mayfield never troubled to look. The books all came from the Indianapolis public library, so they must be all right. They were fairy tales at first and later mythology. The mythology of the Greeks and Romans which somehow never stepped out of the marble for her; and the intensely human mythology of the Icelanders and of the Celts which she liked better, and later the mythology of India which fascinated her most of all because it had apparently neither beginning nor end. While her mother and her mother's friends were dabbling in Christian Science and "New Thought" she was lost in the mysteries of the transmigration of souls. Perhaps it was all this delving into the past that gave to her wide brown eyes what is called the spirituelle look—a look decidedly contradicted by her sturdy body; perhaps, too, it was extensive reading that finally decided her not to try to write, but to express herself in painting, a medium through which she could depict emotions and dramas rather than ideas and facts.

There came to her at the age of fourteen a development which, while it increased her faith in things supernormal and for a while fascinated her into a deeper delving into the religions of the East, had the final effect of frightening her away from things of the mind and turning her activities into more beautiful channels. She had read of the objectification of ideas and the materialization of thoughts and wanted to try to do these things herself, without quite knowing what exercise she should make of her knowledge even though it came to her. Like many people of a spiritual yet intense nature, of her five senses the sense of smell was the keenest. She liked flowers for their odour more than for colour or form. One winter day when she had returned home from school and was sitting alone with her books—looking out at the snow-laden trees instead of studying—she thought of spring and violets; she was tired of winter, eager for the spring to come again, and she tried to see violets, to catch their scent and their colour. She closed her eyes and shut out the winter room and the frost-rimmed window—all around her in great warm waves of fragrance rose the odour of violets—exquisite English violets with the freshness of the woods in them. She took deep breaths, keeping her eyes closed lest the miracle should fade. Then when she had quite satisfied herself that she really did smell violets she opened her eyes. All about her on the floor, on the table, covering her schoolbooks, they lay, great

heaps of odorous purple blossoms mingled with rich green leaves. With a little cry of pleasure and amazement she stretched out her hands to gather them in and they were gone. The room was as it had been before, but the odour was not gone. For many minutes the fragrance of violets filled her nostrils. She was afraid to close her eyes again to bring back the vision, but the following day she tried again, and many times afterward. She tried different flowers, carnations and Chinese lilies. She could not always see the flowers, but she seldom failed with the odour. The game fascinated her so that she spent every moment that she could find alone in materializing flowers. Then came to her the desire to take the next step—to make other people realize her power. Her mother, being the least imaginative person she knew as well as the one most conveniently near, she decided to try with her. It was one evening when her father was not at home. Her mother was busy embroidering—one of those never to be finished articles of no conceivable use, which occupy the hands of women who have no active interest in life. Ruth was pretending to read. She dared not shut her eyes lest her mother should observe. But she bent unseeing eyes over her book and concentrated on the inner vision of the mystic—shutting out everything except the thought of violets. They were her mother's favourite flower. For many seconds after she herself was surrounded by the odour of violets and could see them on her book, her

mother did not speak. Then she looked up restlessly from her embroidery.

"Have you been using perfume, Ruth?—you know I don't approve of young girls—"

"No, Mother, I haven't. I haven't any to use."

"I smell perfume—violet perfume—it's more like real violets than just perfume—don't you notice it? The whole room is heavy with it."

She dropped her embroidery and moved about the room as if hunting for the flowers though she knew there were none there.

"It must have been my imagination—it's gone now. Strange, I was sure I smelt violets. I must ask Doctor Gorton about it. It may be a dangerous symptom."

Ruth did not speak. She was rather ashamed and not a little frightened. There was nothing of the mischievous about her. She did not want to play tricks. She had just wanted to test her power, but this was the last time that she consciously tried to use it. For some time the illusion of flowers persisted whenever she thought of them, but she tried not to think of them and before many months the experiment was a thing of the past. It persisted in Ruth only in a deep-rooted faith in the power of mind, and in the truth of many things that the average person considered superstition. When she heard of deaths and births and marriages—of good luck and bad luck—of coincidences and accidents, it seemed to her that behind the obvious and accepted

causes of all these things she could trace an inner and spiritual reason—the working of forces that laughed at the clumsy working of material machinery. Yet she no longer delved. For a while she actually made a conscious effort to look at life in the ordinary way. She was helped in this by the death of her father, which placed her in a position of responsibility toward her invalid mother, and made her life too full of reality to leave much room for the occult and supernatural.

She hadn't realized quite how much she had loved her mother until she died. Mother had been old-fashioned and fussy, but then all invalids were fussy, and she had been a dear about letting her go on with her studies after Father died, even though she wouldn't move to Chicago as Ruth wished. They could have lived as cheaply in Chicago and Ruth could have gone to the art institute there, but Mother wouldn't consent to the move. She wanted to stay near her friends. Ruth couldn't understand that. Her mother's friends were all such ordinary people. Kind-hearted, but quite hopelessly ordinary. It was curious that her mother's death had realized for her one of her most cherished dreams. Mother knew that she was going to die. The doctors had told her so, and she had told Ruth. It made Ruth cry, but her mother didn't shed any tears. That was why Ruth did. If her mother had cried Ruth would have been more controlled, but her mother was so unnaturally calm.

"When I am gone I want you to go to your father's sister, Gloria Mayfield. I hate to send you there, but there's no one else of your blood, and you're too young to live alone. Gloria has retired from the stage and they say she is quite respectable now, and besides you won't be dependent on her. Now that there will be no more doctors' bills to pay, there will be enough money for you to live on, more than any young girl ought to have in her own hands. It is all in trust and you will have just the income until you are twenty-one." Ruth made no comment to this. Having handled her mother's business affairs she knew that her income would be very small indeed, but she and her mother had different ideas as to how much a young girl should spend. "Of course I expect you to pay your way with your aunt," her mother went on. "But you must live with some older woman and she is your father's sister."

She said it as if the fact that Gloria Mayfield was her father's sister answered all arguments.

"Where does Aunt Gloria live, Mother?" asked Ruth. She accepted the fact that her mother would die soon without making an effort to persuade either herself or her mother that there was any hope that the doctors might be mistaken. She had known for years that her mother would not live long. Doctors, New Thought, Christian Science, and Theosophy had all been appealed to without having any appreciable effect on her mother's health. Ruth being perfectly healthy was inclined to have faith in the

New Thought. She disliked the Science because of the word Christian, but was inclined to believe that any one of these numerous things might have helped if used alone. When her father had died first it had seemed unreal—impossible almost, for Ruth and her father had always expected her mother to go first, though neither of them would have put such a thought into words. It was just an unspoken understanding between them.

"In New York," Mrs. Mayfield had answered; and Ruth was ashamed that her first thought on hearing this amazing news was that in New York she could study in the best American art schools.

"How old is she?" asked Ruth. She had been a bit troubled by her mother's words about an older woman. Ruth had no desire to go to New York to be controlled by some elderly female relative.

"I don't know. I never saw her. In her younger days she was abroad a great deal, and then I never cared to meet her. She was younger than your father, quite a lot younger, but she must have reached years of discretion by this time. I hope so for your sake. Perhaps I'm not doing the right thing by telling you to go to her, but after all she is your father's sister and will be your only relative after I am gone."

"Have you written to her—do you want me to write?"

"No. I didn't write to her before and I can't

start now. You will go to her after I'm gone as your father's daughter. Your claim on her is through him, not me. You can write to her yourself as soon—as soon as you know. Her address is in that little red book on the desk—at least that was her address five years ago, when your poor father died. She didn't come to the funeral, though she did write to me, and she may have moved since. She probably has. I think on the whole you'd better write now so that the letter will have time to follow her."

Ruth did write and her aunt had not moved, for by a curious coincidence Aunt Gloria's answer came on the very day that her mother died. At the time, concerned with her grief, Ruth didn't read the letter very carefully, but afterward—after the funeral, and after all the innumerable details had been settled, she went back to it and read it again. She didn't know exactly what to think of it. It filled her with doubts. Almost she persuaded herself to disregard her mother's wish and not go to Aunt Gloria at all, but she had already told all her mother's kind friends that that was what she would do. It gave her a logical excuse for refusing all of the offers of the well-meaning women who asked her to come and stop with them "for a few weeks at least until you are more yourself."

Ruth realized that she had never felt so much herself as she did now—rather hopelessly alone and independent in a way that frightened her. These

kind women were all her mother's friends, not hers. She had none. She had always prided herself on being different from other girls and not interested in the things they cared for—boys and parties and dress. Even at the art school she had found the other students disappointingly frivolous. They had not taken their art seriously as she did. The letter was curious:

"My dear child," she had written, "by all means come to me in New York if your mother dies. But why anticipate? She'll probably live for years. I hope so. To say I hope so sounds almost like a lack of hospitality and to send you an urgent invitation to come, under the circumstances, sounds—This is getting too complicated. Come whenever you need me, I'm always at home now."

And the letter was signed with her full name, Gloria Mayfield. She had not even called Ruth niece, or signed herself "your loving aunt," or anything that might be reasonably expected.

Ruth might have lingered on at home, but she had refused the hospitality of her mother's friends and the house was empty and desolate and she was dressed in black. She hadn't wanted to dress in black, but she hadn't the courage to shock people by continuing to wear colours, so she hurriedly finished all the ghastly business that some one must always finish after a funeral, and then she packed her trunks, putting in all the pictures and books that she liked best, and took a train for New York. She

had a plan in the back of her mind about a studio there. She had never seen a real studio, but she had read about them, and if Aunt Gloria proved disagreeable, she would go and live in one. She wondered a bit what sort of a place Aunt Gloria lived in. The address sounded aristocratic and sort of English, Gramercy Square. She liked the sound of it.

Her mother's death had hurt her cruelly, but she was so young that already she was beginning to rebound. The journey helped to revive her spirits. Everything interested her, but her first sight of New York disappointed her vaguely. If she had known, her disappointment was caused only because the cab driver took her down Fourth Avenue instead of Fifth, and there was little to interest her in the dull publishing buildings and wholesale houses, and she missed even the shabby green of Madison Square. Her spirits rose a bit when the cab turned into Gramercy Square. All the fresh greenness of it, the children playing within the iron-barred enclosure, the old-fashioned houses and clubs and the big, new apartment buildings looking so clean and quiet in the morning sunlight, appealed to her. She rather expected the cab to stop before one of the apartment houses, but instead it stopped on the north side of the park. Her aunt lived in a house then. This was also cheering. The cab driver carried her bag for her up the high steps and she rang the bell with a fast-beating heart. She didn't

know exactly what she had expected—perhaps that Aunt Gloria would open the door in person—and she started back when it was opened by a tall negro who looked as startled as herself.

"Is Aunt Gloria—is Miss Mayfield at home?"

"Are you expected?"

He spoke in a soft, precise voice unlike the voice of any nigger Ruth had ever heard before. She knew he must be a servant though he was not in livery, and she looked at him as she answered, suddenly impressed by his regular features, his straight hair, and yellow-brown skin.

"She didn't know exactly when I'd come, but she knew I was coming. I am her niece."

The servant picked up her bag, which the cab driver had left beside her and opened the door wider for her to come in.

"Miss Mayfield is at home. I'll let her know that you are here if you will wait a few moments."

She was in a wide hall now from which an open staircase rose to rooms above. The hall was very cheerful with white woodwork and grey walls hung with etchings in narrow black frames. Uninvited Ruth perched hesitatingly on the edge of a Chippendale chair and waited. The coloured man walked to the far end of the hall, opened a door there and called:

"Amy, come here, you."

Amy came, a round, short, black woman of the type most familiar to Ruth.

To her the man evidently explained the situation, but his soft voice did not carry to Ruth's end of the hall; not so the voice of Amy. Ruth could hear her replies quite plainly.

"Mis' Mayfiel' a'n yit had her breakfus'—I'se jes now makin' de tray—ef you sez so I'll tell her, but dis a'n no hour to be talkin' to Mis' Mayfiel'."

Both Amy and the man disappeared through the door and soon Amy emerged again carrying a breakfast tray. She went past Ruth and up the stairs. Ruth was growing impatient and rather offended. Of course she should have sent a wire, but even so, Gloria Mayfield was her aunt and she should have been taken to her at once. Evidently her aunt ate breakfast in bed. Perhaps she was an invalid like her mother. Ruth hoped not. Evidently too she had a lot more money than Ruth had supposed. Her impatience was not alleviated when Amy came down the stairs again without speaking to her. It was unbearable that she should sit here in the hall of her aunt's house, ignored like a book agent. In another moment the man had reappeared.

"Miss Mayfield will see you as soon as she can dress, Miss, and would you like breakfast in your room or downstairs?"

He had picked up Ruth's bag as he spoke.

"I've had breakfast," said Ruth. She had indeed eaten breakfast in Grand Central Station. It was only seven o'clock in the morning when she arrived in New York, and that had seemed rather an early

hour for even a relative to drop into her aunt's home unexpectedly.

She followed the servant up the stairs, mentally commenting on how she hated "educated niggers." Yet she had to admit there was nothing disrespectful in his manner. He set her bag down in one of the rooms opening out of the circular landing and asked for her trunk checks, and suggested sending Amy up to make her comfortable. She gave him the trunk checks, refused the offer of Amy's help, and when he had closed the door sat down to examine her surroundings and wait for the appearance of her aunt.

There had been a certain charm about the entrance hall and stairway of the house, but the room in which she found herself was as uninteresting as possible. It was large and high-ceiled and almost empty and streamers of loosened and discoloured wall paper hung from the walls. It was in the rear of the house. The few essential pieces of furniture in the room made it look even larger than it really was. It looked like what it was, a very much unused bedroom in a house very much too large for its inhabitants. She walked to the window and looked out, but the view did not interest her. It was only of the rear of the houses on Twenty-second Street. The house opposite had a tiny back garden that ran out to meet a similar back garden in the rear of her aunt's house. Ruth did not call this plot of ground a garden, because it had nothing growing in it except

one stunted, twisted tree on the branches of which September had left a dozen pale green leaves. It made her think of an anæmic slum child. Looking at it Ruth felt suddenly very sad and neglected. She had hoped that her aunt would not be too much like a relative, but now she began to persuade herself that she had looked forward to the embracing arms of a motherly aunt, and her cold reception had quite broken her heart. Instead of a fussy, motherly relative she had found a cold, selfish woman living in a house much too large, surrounded by servants—Ruth had only seen two but there were probably more. She was unwelcome; she had been shoved off into the shabbiest room in the house by an insolent servant. But she was not a pauper. She would tell her aunt very coldly that she had only come to pay her respects and was going immediately to an hotel.

"Oh no, Aunt Gloria; I couldn't think of imposing on you," she could hear herself saying, and of course then her aunt would urge her to stay, but she wouldn't. What could her aunt do in such a big house? It was four floors and a basement. It must be full of shabby, unused rooms like this one. Just then there was a knock at the door, and she hadn't even smoothed her hair or powdered her nose as she had intended doing before her aunt sent for her.

"Come in," she said. Her voice sounded husky and unused. The words were scarcely out of her mouth when the door opened and a woman swept into the room—the tallest woman she had ever seen,

at least six feet tall and slender without being thin—a graceful tiger lily of a woman with masses of auburn hair and big grey, black-lashed eyes and a straight white nose and a crushed flower of a mouth. With one hand she was holding a gorgeous, nameless garment of amber silk and lace and the other hand was held out to Ruth. Even as she took it Ruth realized that it would have been preposterous to have expected the goddess to kiss her.

"I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting—Ruth," she said. Her voice was like silver bells ringing.

"I should have wired," admitted Ruth. Her voice sounded flat and toneless after hearing her aunt speak.

"It would have been awkward if I hadn't happened to be in town, but I was, so it's all right. You're older than I thought, I was afraid that you'd turn out a little girl."

"And you're ever so much younger than I thought, Aunt Gloria," said Ruth, beginning to gain her composure.

"Thirty-five last birthday," said her aunt.

Immediately Ruth realized that thirty-five was the only possible age for a woman. To be older or younger than thirty-five was infinitely dull. She herself at nineteen, which only a few moments ago she had considered a very interesting age indeed, was quite hopeless.

"But come, we mustn't stay in this awful room. I didn't tell George just where to take you. Cer-

tainly not here. I'll have a room fixed up for you. Did George send for your trunks? He said you'd had breakfast, but that can't be true—coffee perhaps, but not breakfast—I only had coffee myself. So we can eat together while they're getting a room ready for you." She was sweeping Ruth along with her down the stairs as she talked, not waiting for answers to anything she said. At the foot she turned and opened a door at the left of the staircase and peered in.

"Too gloomy in the dining-room in the morning. We'll go in here," and she turned to the other side, opening a door into a big room, all furnished in soft grey and dull gold. Ruth's artist eye perceived how such a neutral-tinted background was just the thing to enhance the colourful appearance and personality of her aunt. The only touch of vivid colour in the room was in the hangings at the deep, high windows that looked out on the park.

"Have Amy bring our breakfast in here," said Gloria, and then Ruth saw that George was standing in the doorway of the room they had just entered, though she had not heard her aunt call him. Later she observed the same thing many times, that George always appeared as if by magic and seemingly without being called whenever her aunt wanted him.

The room was full of comfortable, low, cushioned chairs, and seated on two of them with a table between, on which George had laid a white cloth,

Ruth and her aunt Gloria gave each other that full scrutiny which surprise and embarrassment had previously denied them.

Ruth could see now that her aunt was not really so young as she had at first appeared. There were fine lines around her large eyes and art, not nature had painted her lashes black. Her fine brows had been "formed" and there were little, pale freckles gleaming on her white nose and across her long, cleanly moulded hands. Ruth saw all these things and they only strengthened her belief that Aunt Gloria was the most beautiful and charming woman in the world. She hoped very much that her aunt would like her, but she was not sanguine about it. She tried to tell herself that this woman was only her father's sister, but it was hard to believe.

"Now, tell me all about it," said Gloria.

"There's very little to tell. Mother died on the tenth—your letter arrived on the same day. Of course it wasn't unexpected. She had been an invalid for almost ten years, so it wasn't a shock. I was the only relative at the funeral, but Mother had ever so many friends—"

She paused, wondering if she ought to tell Aunt Gloria about the flowers, the Eastern Star wreath, and—

"I don't mean that," Gloria interrupted her thoughts. "I mean how your mother happened to suggest that you come here. You know Jack's wife didn't approve of me—refused to meet me even,

and I can't understand. Was there some sort of deathbed forgiveness, or what?"

There was the faintest trace of mockery in her voice, but somehow Ruth could not be angry, though she knew that this woman, her father's sister, was laughing at her dead mother and her dead mother's conventions and moralities. She decided that she would be as frank as her aunt.

"No, Aunt Gloria, I don't think Mother's views had changed at all. She sent me here because you are my only living relative and she thought I was too young to live alone—and I came," she continued bravely, "because New York is the best place in America to study art and I want to be a great painter. But if you don't want me here I'll live alone—I have money you know, and Mother intended that I should pay my own way."

"I understand," said Gloria, nodding. "That would be in character—a sort of blood is stronger than Bohemia idea."

"And then," continued Ruth, determined to be absolutely frank, "I think Mother was under the impression that you were older than you are, and had settled down—you have retired from the stage?"

Again Gloria laughed.

"My dear child, I've done nothing but retire from the stage ever since I first went on it, but that doesn't matter. I agree with your mother that you will be much better off here with me than alone, and

I shall be very glad to have you—it means one more permanent resident in this huge barn of a house. Only please don't call me Aunt. Call me Gloria. My being your aunt is more or less of an accident. The fact that I like you is of vastly more importance, and if you like me we shall get on very well together."

"I think you're wonderful," admitted Ruth, blushing deeply.

"Very well, then, you shall stay here—you can have two rooms or more if you want 'em, fixed up to suit yourself, and you can spend your income on your clothes and your education—but you will be here as my guest, not as my relative. I dislike relatives inordinately—don't you?"

Without giving Ruth time to reply she went on:

"Have you thought about where you're going to study?"

"No; I suppose there are a number of places."

"There are, of course; the Art Students' League is one of the best. The associations there should be good. You'll be working with the strugglers. How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen and the whole world before you, work and failure and success and New York and Paris and your first love affair—you're young and you don't have to nibble at the loaf; you can take big, hungry bites, and when the time for nibbling does come, you'll have a banquet to remember."

"Where is the Art Students' League?" asked Ruth.

Her aunt fascinated her; she talked "like a book," Ruth thought, but Ruth herself was practical despite her dreaming and the talk of art schools interested her.

"Oh, it's a school with small fees—if you have a lot of talent they give scholarships—I don't really know much about it, except that it's on Fifty-seventh Street some place, and that it is supposed to be proper and good. You might try it for a year—then you'll probably be wanting Paris. In another year I may feel old enough to chaperon you."

After breakfast they went through the house, planning where Ruth should establish herself, finally deciding on two rooms on the fourth floor, because one of them had a skylight and could be used as a studio, where Ruth could work undisturbed.

The next few days were spent in buying furniture, in having the rooms redecorated, and in becoming familiar with New York.

Ruth was determined not to be impressed by anything, a determination that led Gloria Mayfield to suspect that her niece was of a phlegmatic temperament, and to wonder why she wanted to be an artist. Only the quiet sense of humour that Ruth displayed at rare intervals, encouraged her to believe that having her niece with her might not be a bad arrangement.

Ruth on her part discovered that her Aunt Gloria

had a wide and varied circle of friends and no particularly well-defined scheme of existence. And she discovered a little of Gloria Mayfield's past, the past that had been so shrouded in mystery in her mother's house. It was when Ruth had made a remark about her aunt living alone in such a large house.

"Yes, it is large, but what am I to do?" said Gloria. "My second husband wished it on me and my third was kind enough to settle enough income on me to pay the taxes, and there you are. Of course I could let it to some one else, but it's nice to have a lot of room."

Ruth could not disguise her shock and astonishment.

"Oh, didn't you know?" asked Gloria, smiling cheerfully.

"I didn't know you'd been married at all," said Ruth.

"Only once, really—the others were almost too casual. I supposed your mother had told you."

"Did they die?" asked Ruth.

"Not to my knowledge—I never killed any of them," said Gloria.

And Ruth put this conversation away in the back of her brain for future reference, along with several dozen other things that she didn't exactly understand.

CHAPTER II

RUTH would have liked a scholarship—not because she could not easily afford the small fees at the Art Students' League, but because a scholarship would have meant that she had unusual talent; but she didn't get one. No one seemed particularly interested in her work. The woman who enrolled her in the League was as casual as a clerk in an hotel.

The manner of the enrolment clerk and the grandeur of the Fine Arts Building produced a feeling of insignificance in Ruth that was far from pleasant. She engaged her locker for the year, and when she was led to it to put her board and paints away, and saw the rows upon rows of other lockers, she felt even smaller. Was it possible that all those lockers were needed? That so many other girls and boys were also art students? If there was an art student for every locker and each of them shared her determination to become a great painter, the world would be so flooded with splendid art that one might better be a stenographer. Then she comforted herself that all of the students could not possibly succeed. Some of them, the girls especially, would doubtless give up art for marriage and babies. Some of the men would become commercial-

ized, go in for illustrating or even advertising, but she would go "onward and upward," as her instructor in Indianapolis had so thrillingly said. She felt better after that; and seeing her reflection in a shop window she felt better still. She wasn't beautiful, but she was interesting looking, she told herself. The way she combed her almost black hair down over her ears Madonna fashion, her little low-heeled shoes, her complete absence of waist line, all marked her as "different."

She had enrolled for the morning class in portrait painting from 9:00 to 12:30 and the afternoon class in life drawing from 1:00 to 4:30 and she would attend the Friday afternoon lectures on anatomy. They began at 4:30, after the first of November, so she could go direct from her life class to the lecture. She would have liked to attend some of the evening classes, too, but Gloria had suggested that she wait a bit.

"My word, child, it's all right to work hard. One must work hard, but don't spend twenty-four hours a day at it. It's bad enough to begin at the unearthly hour of nine in the morning without spending your evenings there, too."

Afterward Ruth was glad that she had not enrolled in any of the evening classes. She usually returned to the house on Gramercy Square about five o'clock in the afternoon, just when Gloria's day seemed to be properly begun, and there were always people there who interested Ruth, though she took

little part in the conversation. Ruth would come into the hall, her sketches under her arm, and Gloria would call to her and she would walk into the big comfortable room and be introduced to half a dozen people, whose names she seldom remembered. The people would nod to her and go on with their conversation, and she would sit back listening and watching, feeling more like an audience at a play than one of the group of people in a drawing-room.

Most of the conversation was quite meaningless to her, but there was one man, one of the few who did not change in the ever-changing group, who interested her intensely. She gathered that he was a playwright and that he had written the book and lyrics for a musical comedy that was to have its New York *première* soon. One of the other men called him a show doctor, and said that he had written lines into over half the shows on Broadway.

All of the other people seemed to think him "terribly clever," but Ruth didn't understand all of the things at which they laughed. They were always begging him to sing his latest song, and he never demurred, though any one could tell with half an ear that he hadn't any voice at all. He sang in a queer, half-chanty voice, with a curious appealing note in it.

"Do you really like his singing?" she once asked Gloria.

"His voice, you mean?" Gloria looked at her with the little frown between her eyes and the

amused twist to her mouth that Ruth often observed when her aunt was explaining things to her. "Of course not; it's not his voice, it's his song. He's the cleverest song writer in New York, and he's already written two fairly successful plays. He's young, you know."

"Is he? I thought he must be thirty at least."

Then Gloria laughed outright.

"He is about thirty, but that isn't old. He's a funny, old dear, don't you think so?"

"Yes," admitted Ruth. "He dresses oddly—that is—"

"I know what you mean, but you see a man like Terry Riordan doesn't have to keep his trousers pressed. No other man is worth listening to while Terry is in the room."

Ruth decided that she would pay particular attention to Terry Riordan the next time she met him.

Her opportunity came the next day. She had gone out to lunch that day and had been a little late at life class in consequence, and had to stand up at an easel in the back instead of sitting among the more fortunate ones in the front rows, where early arrival had usually placed her. The model was a man—"Krakowski, the wrestler," one of the girls had whispered to her. "He's got a wonderful body; we're lucky to get him."

Ruth could not control a little gasp of admiration when he stepped on the model throne. He looked

like a statue with his shining smooth-muscled body, and he stood almost as still. It was several minutes before Ruth could get the proper, impersonal attitude toward him. Most of the models had quite uninteresting faces, but Krakowski had a face almost as handsome as his body, and there was a half-smile on his lips as if he were secretly amused at the students. For a second Ruth saw them through his eyes—thin, earnest-eyed girls, dressed in "arty" garments, squinting at him over drawing-boards as if the fate of nations depended on their work, well-dressed dabblers and shabby strugglers after beauty. She noted again the two old women, the fat one with the dyed hair, and the ribbons and art jewelry and the thin one whose hair is quite frankly grey. The fat one had attracted Ruth's attention the very first day because in the rest period she ran around insisting that every one near her should look at her work and offer criticism, and when the instructor came through she monopolized as much of his time as possible to his obvious annoyance.

Why didn't they think of studying art twenty years ago? Ruth wondered. It seemed to her that the model was thinking the same thing. Then she forgot his face and began to block in her sketch.

The girl next to her had a scholarship, her name was Dorothy Winslow, a rather pretty, wide-mouthed girl with a shock of corn-coloured bobbed hair and very merry blue eyes. Out of the corner of her eye Ruth watched her work. She had large,

beautiful hands and the ends of her slim fingers were always smudged with charcoal or blotted up with paint. She wore a painting-smock of purple and green batik. Ruth was tremendously impressed, but tried not to be. She was torn between a desire to dress in the same manner and a determination to consider herself superior to such affectations and remain smug in the consciousness of her conventional dress. Still she did wonder how she would look with her hair bobbed. How fast Dorothy Winslow worked. Her pencil seemed so sure. Never mind, she must not be jealous.

"Facility? Facility is dangerous—big things aren't done in a few minutes—Rome wasn't built in a day," she said to herself in the best manner of her instructor in Indianapolis. One thing that puzzled her was the way the instructors left the students alone. They were there to teach, why didn't they do it? Instead, they passed around about twice a week and looked at the drawings and said something like "You're getting on all right—just keep it up," or now and then really ga a criticism, but more often just looked and passed on to the next without a word in the most tantalizing manner possible. The reticence of the instructors was amply balanced by the loquacity of the students. They looked at each other's work and criticized or praised in the frankest manner possible, and seem ingly without a hint of jealousy or self-consciousness. It was time to rest. The model left the throne and

immediately the students all left their drawing-boards to talk.

Dorothy Winslow leaned over Ruth's shoulder.

"That's really awfully nice, the way you've got that line,—" she pointed with one long, slim charcoal-smudged finger.

"Do you think so? Thank you," said Ruth.

"Krakowski's lovely to work from, anyway. I'd love to paint him. He's got such an interesting head."

"Yes—it distracted me from my work a little," admitted Ruth. "Why, you've almost got a finished sketch," she continued, looking at Dorothy's board.

"I always work fast," admitted Dorothy, "but I'll do it all over again a dozen times before the week is finished."

"I wonder how she happened to take up art," said Ruth, nodding toward the broad back of the fat lady with the dyed hair.

"Oh, she's—she's just one of the perpetual students—they say she's been coming here for ten years—didn't they have any perpetual students where you came from? But perhaps this is your first year?"

"No, I studied a year in the Indianapolis Art School and we didn't have any perpetual art students. Is the one with grey hair a perpetual student, too?"

"Yes; we had one, a man too, in San Francisco where I came from."

"Why do they do it? Isn't it rather pitiful, or are they rich women with a fad?"

"No, indeed, they're not rich. I never heard of a perpetual student who was rich. Why, Camille De Muth, the fat one, sometimes has to pose in the portrait class to earn money to pay for her life."

"How does she live?" asked Ruth.

"Dear Lord, as well ask me why is an art student as how does one live—how do any of us live, except of course the lucky ones with an allowance from home?"

All the time she was talking, Dorothy Winslow was moving her hands, defying all the laws of physiology by bending her long fingers back over the tops of them, and by throwing one white thumb out of joint.

"But you haven't told me why they do it—why they keep on studying year after year. Don't they try to make any use of what they've learned?"

"Not that I ever heard of—they're just—just art artists. They spend their lives in class and at exhibitions, but I've never tried to understand them—too busy trying to understand myself."

"What do they do when they're not here?" asked Ruth.

"They spend their leisure in the cool marble twilight of the Metropolitan, making bad copies of old masters."

The model had reappeared and they went back to their boards, but after class Ruth found that

Dorothy Winslow was walking by her side toward Fifth Avenue.

"Do you go downtown?" asked Dorothy.

"Yes," admitted Ruth. She was really very much interested in Dorothy, but she was a bit afraid that the girl would attract attention on the street. She now had a vivid blue tain with a yellow tassel on her fluffy hair.

"How do you go?"

"On the 'bus," said Ruth.

"So do I, when I can afford it; when I can't I walk, but I guess I can spend the dime today. I got some fashion work to do last week."

"Fashions?" Ruth could not keep the scorn out of her voice.

"Oh, I know how you feel about that, but one can't become Whistler or Sargent all in a day, and paint and Michelet paper and canvas cost money."

"You must be awfully clever to be able to earn money with your work already," admitted Ruth, a bit ashamed of herself.

"I have talent," admitted Dorothy, "but then so many people have talent. I've got an idea that work counts a whole lot more than talent, but of course that's an awfully practical, inartistic idea—only I can't help it. I had to come to New York and I couldn't come without a scholarship, so I worked and got it. What do you think about it?"

"Work counts of course, but without the divine spark of genius—one must have talent and genius,

and then work added makes the ideal combination. Why, if only hard work were necessary, any one, any stevedore or common labourer or dull book-keeper, could become a great artist."

"That doesn't sound so silly to me. I really think they could, if the idea only occurred to them and they didn't give up. I think any one can be anything they please, if they only please it long enough."

It was like Ruth to answer this with a quotation.

"I don't think so," she said. "'There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may.'"

"Perhaps, but some people do a lot more rough-hewing than others, and I'm going to hew my way to a position as the greatest American portrait painter, and it won't be so rough either."

Before such blind self-confidence Ruth was dumb. She also intended to be a great something or other in the world of art, but she had never thought definitely enough about it to decide just what it would be. She did think now, or spoke without thinking.

"Then I'll be the greatest landscape painter—landscapes with figures."

Before they parted at Twentieth Street, Ruth had promised to go to an exhibition with Dorothy on the following Saturday.

Gloria had given her a latch key and she went into the house on Gramercy Square without ringing the bell. She expected to hear her aunt's voice, but instead a man's voice called out:

"That you, Gloria?"

She answered by walking into the drawing room, disappointed at not finding Gloria there.

"Where is Gloria?"

They both said it at once, and then they both laughed. Terry Riordan was very appealing when he laughed. He had risen at her entrance, and was standing loose-limbed yet somehow graceful in his formless tweeds.

"I've been waiting at least an hour for her, though it was obvious that George didn't want me here. He quite overpowered me with big words and proper English to explain why he thought my waiting quite uncalled for."

"He's like that, but Gloria is sure to come if you wait long enough," said Ruth, sinking wearily into a chair and dropping her sketches beside her on the floor.

"Even if she doesn't I couldn't find a more comfortable place than this to loaf. I'm too nervous to be any place else in comfort. The show opens tonight. It was all right at the tryout in Stamford, but that doesn't mean much. I want a cigarette, and George frightened me so that I didn't dare ask him where they are."

"Frightened? You, Mr. Riordan?"

"There, you looked like Gloria then. You are relatives, of course, same name and everything, but I never noticed any resemblance before. Suppose you must be distant relatives."

"Gloria says we must be very distant relatives in

order to be close friends," said Ruth, dodging the invitation to tell the extent of her relationship to Gloria.

"As for the cigarettes, there should be some in the blue Ming jar over there, or, if you prefer, you can roll your own. There's tobacco in the box—Gloria's own tobacco."

"Thanks; I suppose I could have found it myself, but I was actually afraid to look around—George gave me such a wicked look—he did indeed," said Terry. "What a wonderful woman Gloria Mayfield is," he continued as he lit a cigarette.

"I know," said Ruth. "No wonder she has so many friends."

"Every one loves Gloria," continued Terry.

"You love her?" asked Ruth. She felt that this man was confiding in her. She wondered if he had proposed to Gloria and if his suit was hopeless. She felt sorry for him, but even while she sympathized she could not keep the three husbands out of her mind. Three husbands were rather overwhelming, but four! Somehow, it didn't seem quite right, even for so amazing a woman as Gloria.

"I should say I do love Gloria. Why, she lets me read everything I've written and always applauds. That's one of the things I came for today. I've written that number for Dolly Derwent. Want to hear it?"

"Yes, please; I'd love to hear it."

"Got to tell some one," said Terry, and without waiting for further encouragement, he began singing in his queer, plaintive voice, that made his words sound even more nonsensical than they were, a song the refrain of which was:

*"Any judge can recognize
A perfect lady by her eyes,
And they ain't got nothing, they ain't got nothing,
They ain't got nothing on me."*

"Do you think that'll get across? You know Dolly Derwent. Don't you think that will suit her?"

Now, Ruth had never seen Dolly Derwent, and looking at Terry Riordan she suddenly decided to drop pretence.

"I've never seen her," she admitted, "and while I suppose your songs are awfully clever and funny, I don't know anything about the stage and half the time I don't know what you're all talking about. You see I haven't been in New York long and I spend most of my time at the Art Students' League and I'm afraid I'm not much good as a critic."

For a few moments Terry did not answer. He just looked at her, smiling. His smile diffused a warm glow all round her heart as if he were telling her that he understood all about her and rather admired her for not understanding all the stage patter.

"Suppose you show me your sketches. I don't know any more about art than you do about the stage, so then we'll be even," he said.

"There's nothing here that would interest you—just studies from the life class."

"I say there's an idea for a number—chorus of art students in smocks and artists' caps and a girl with an awfully good figure on a model throne—no, that's been used. Still there ought to be some sort of an original variation of the theme." He took out his notebook and wrote something in it.

"Shall I bring tea, Miss Ruth?"

George was standing in the doorway, having appeared suddenly from nowhere.

"Yes, thank you, George—"

"Perhaps if we go on just as if we weren't waiting for Gloria, she'll come."

"I'd forgotten that we were waiting for her," said Terry. "Do you know, I think that nigger is jealous of me—you know, as dogs are sometimes jealous of their mistress' friends—and he's only being civil now because I'm talking to you instead of Gloria. Some day he's going to put something in my high ball."

"What a terrible thing to say," said Ruth. "I'm sure George is perfectly harmless. It's only that he doesn't talk like other niggers."

"Don't call him a nigger!" exclaimed Terry, pretending to be shocked. "Hasn't Gloria told you

that he is a Hindoo—half-caste I imagine, and he came from some weird place, and I heartily wish he'd return to it."

A Hindoo—that explained George's appearance, but it made him more puzzling as a servant than before. He was not like the imaginations of Hindoos that her reading had built up, but perhaps as Terry said he was a half-caste. Terry's words, for the moment, surprised her out of speech.

"Here's Gloria now," he said. "We must stop talking treason. She thinks she has the best servants in the world."

Gloria came in, filling the room with cold outer air mingled with the odour of the violets pinned on her sables.

"Just look who's here," she said, holding a small, plump, frizzled, blond woman of about forty in front of her. "Billie Irwin—she came over from London with the unfortunate 'Love at First Sight' company, and here she is with no more engagement than a trapeze performer with a broken leg—you know her, don't you, Terry?—well, anyway you know her now, and this is Ruth Mayfield—not in the profession, an artist of a different kind."

"How interesting!" murmured Billie Irwin.

"Tea? Take it away, George—we don't want tea. I want dinner just as soon as Amy can get it. We're all going to see the opening of 'Three Merry Men.' You thought I was going to fail you, didn't you, Terry? But we're not, we'll all be there. And,

George, do get a room ready for Miss Irwin. She's going to stay for a few days with me."

"She means a few months," whispered Terry to Ruth, thereby establishing between them a secret confidence.

That night Ruth got a new impression of Terry Riordan. He did not stay to dinner, though Gloria asked him, but he met them at the theatre. Every one seemed to know him and treated him as quite an important person. It was her first experience of a first night, and she got the impression that these people were waiting through the acts for the intermissions instead of waiting through the intermissions for the acts. Terry wasn't in their box, he had a seat in the back of the theatre with Philip Noel, who had written the music, but he slipped in and out during the evening to chat and to hear words of praise.

"How do you think it's going to go?" Gloria asked him when he returned to their box after the first intermission.

"Badly, I'm afraid; I met several of the newspaper men out there, and they seemed to like it. If the critics like it, it's almost sure to close in three weeks," said Terry.

"I won't believe it. It is sure to have a long run," said Gloria.

"God knows I did my best to lower the moral tone of the thing and make it successful," said Terry. "If it will only run long enough to give me some royalties, just long enough to keep me

going until my comedy is finished, I won't care."

They chatted on, commenting on the people on the stage until Ruth lost all sense of illusion. They took away from her the fairyland sense that had formerly made the theatre a joy, and as yet she had not acquired the knowledge of stagecraft that gives the stage a stronger fascination for theatrical folk than for the people who have never seen it in any way except from "out front."

She knew that the music was all stolen from something else, for a composer, a rival of Philip Noel, who had dropped in to chat with Gloria, had said so; that in an effort to do something original the costumer had produced frightful results, for Terry Riordan had commented on it, and Billie Irwin had spoken of how often the leading woman flatted her notes. Her voice had been bad enough when she started ten years ago, and now it was quite hopeless.

Terry Riordan had not spoken to Ruth since their arrival, when he had pretended to be quite overcome with the grandeur of her gown. Since then he had devoted himself entirely to Gloria. Ruth couldn't blame him for that. Gloria made every one else appear colourless. No wonder Terry Riordan loved her. It was foolish of her to let him occupy her thoughts. No man in his right mind would give her a second thought in the presence of Gloria. Even the thought that she was an art stu-

dent no longer brought comfort. There were so many art students in New York. Still she could not keep Terry out of her mind. It was not that she thought him a genius. Indeed, she rather scorned his slapstick lyrics. New York might bow down before his frayed cuff cleverness, but she was from the Middle West, where men are rated by what they have done, not what they are going to do. She couldn't analyse exactly what it was about Terry Riordan that stirred her emotions—some sympathetic quality in his voice perhaps, his never-failing cheerfulness and his absolute confidence in his own future. She was rather glad that he didn't talk to her very much, for she blushed whenever he spoke to her. She had blushed when he spoke about her frock and old John Courtney had commented on it in his absurd exaggerated manner.

"How charmingly you blush, Miss Mayfield," he had said. "You must pardon an old gentleman for speaking of it, my dear, but I dare say it is the only genuine blush that Broadway has seen these forty years."

If it had been possible to be annoyed by anything the ancient matinée idol said, Ruth would have been annoyed, especially as it momentarily attracted the attention of every one to the party, to herself.

John Courtney was another of Gloria's admirers.

"The best actress in New York," he whispered to Ruth. "But she hasn't had an engagement for three years. She won't take anything but leads, and

there isn't a man who dares play opposite her. It's not alone that she's so tall—though no man likes to play opposite a woman from one to five inches taller than he—it's her personality. She fills the stage. The other players are just so much background."

Later even John Courtney seemed to forget the existence of Ruth, and she sat back in the crowded box in the crowded theatre quite alone. She could not even watch the stage—for they had reduced the people on it to a group of ordinary individuals working at their trade. She had a little sketch pad and a pencil with her and began making caricatures of the principals. She became absorbed in this and forgot to feel alone.

"That nose is wonderful and that's just her trick with her hands. I didn't know you were a cartoonist."

It was Terry Riordan looking over her shoulder. She had not known he was in the box.

"I'm not a cartoonist," she said, making an effort to hide her sketch pad. "I was only doing it for fun."

"But they're great; let me see the others. I had no idea you were so talented. I thought you just daubed around with paint."

From any one else the words would have been cruel enough, but from Terry Riordan they were almost unbearable. She could hardly keep the tears back.

"That isn't talent," she managed to articulate. "It's just facility. I am studying painting—I never do this sort of thing seriously—I was just playing."

He had taken the sketches from her and was looking at her in puzzled wonder.

"Do you mean to say you don't want to do this sort of thing—that you consider it beneath your talent?"

"It doesn't interest me." She spoke with as much dignity as she could muster. For a moment he looked troubled, then his irresistible smile came.

"Never mind, I understand," he said. "Ten years ago I intended to be a modern Shakespeare—and just see the awful end to which I've come."

Just then the curtain went up, and she did not notice that he had not returned her sketches.

Up to this time Gloria had been the gayest person there—so gay that Ruth thought that she had forgotten her existence. She was in the chair in front of Ruth, and had apparently been absorbed in the play and the conversation of the people with her. Suddenly she rose and left the box, pausing just long enough to whisper in Ruth's ear, "I'm going home; Billie will explain."

The others in the box didn't seem to notice. Perhaps they thought Gloria had gone back stage to see some friend and would return. It was only when the final curtain fell and Terry came back to ask them to go to supper that her absence was explained.

"Where's Gloria?" he asked.

"Gone home," said Billie. "She asked me to explain to you that she had to go."

"But why?" asked Terry.

"Because she wanted to—you know Gloria—sudden fit of depression, because she isn't working and wants to work. Why don't you write a play for her, Terry?"

"I will one day perhaps—if I can, but I so wanted her tonight. Let's follow her home and drag her out again."

"Not if you value her friendship," said Billie. "Aren't there enough of us here to make a supper party?" She smiled coyly at him, shrugging her plump shoulders and turning her pale eyes at him in an ingénue ogle.

"Of course—we'll try to be as merry as possible without her."

"I think if you'll help me find a cab I'll go home to Gloria," said Ruth.

"You too?" Terry looked at her reproachfully.

"I'd rather if you don't mind."

"We can't allow you to go alone. I shall be most happy," said John Courtney.

"No indeed. I know that you don't want to miss a word of what they say about Terry's play, and I'd rather go alone. The others would never forgive me for taking you away."

After that it was easy for her to slip away into the darkness and seclusion of a cab, alone with the

thousands in the checked thoroughfare. She wanted to get away from Terry Riordan and his success. She thought she was escaping for the same reason that Gloria had run away, but Gloria could not be as unhappy as she, for Gloria had had her success. Terry Riordan knew that Gloria was a great actress, but he didn't know that she, Ruth Mayfield, was a great painter, at least a potential great painter. He had suggested that she was a cartoonist and he had thought that he was paying her a compliment. Years from now, when she became a beautiful, fascinating woman of thirty like Gloria, even in imagination she couldn't make herself quite thirty-five—they would meet again. It would be at a private view at the Academy, and he would be standing lost in wonder before the picture she would have hung there. Every one would be talking about her and her work, and then they would meet face to face. There would be no condescension in his words and smile then—

She was imagining childish nonsense. By the time she had won her success, Terry would be married to Gloria. It was easy to see that he loved Gloria. Why not? No one could be so beautiful or so charming as Gloria. It was silly to dream of Terry Riordan's love, but she would win his admiration and respect. After all, marriage had never held any place in her plans. She didn't want to marry. She wanted to be a great painter. One must make some sacrifices for that. The cab turned

into the great quiet of Gramercy Square. A soft mist hung over the trees, like quiet tears of renunciation.

She was startled to see lights gleaming in all the lower windows of the house. Inside she found George sitting on the lower step of the stairs. He rose as she entered, but did not respond when she spoke to him. The doors into the drawing-room were open and she looked in. Lying face down on the floor, still fully dressed, was Gloria and scattered around her were the violets from the bouquet she had been wearing. She was quite motionless, and Ruth dared not speak to her. Evidently George was keeping watch.

"Can I do anything?" she whispered to him.

He shook his head and pointed silently up the stairs. She went, hurrying up the three flights as if the act of going up lifted her above her own discontent and above the unhappiness of Gloria. She went into the studio and looked at the canvas on which she had been working. It was hard to wait until morning to begin on it again. It had been a week since she had touched it. When she began she had intended rising early to get an hour's work before breakfast, but evenings in the company of Gloria and her friends had kept her up late and youth claimed its need of rest despite her firmest resolves. It was no good, the picture, anyway. She would paint it all out and begin over again. She would spend her Sundays in the country with the

other art students, sketching. She had not entered into the student life enough. And she had entered into Gloria's life too much. If she had been taking her work more seriously she would not have had time to fall in love with Terry Riordan. She did not question that it was love that had come into her life to complicate things. In Indianapolis it had all seemed so simple. There were paint and canvas and her hands to work with, and she would study and work and exhibit and become famous. Now it was made plain to her that art itself was not a matter of paint and canvas and exhibitions, or even of work as Dorothy Winslow had said, but a matter of men and women, and competition and struggle and love and hate and jealousy and thwarted ambitions like those of the woman who lay down there prostrate with defeat. The defeat that was such a tragic jest—a great talent useless because the actress was too tall. If success was dependent on such things as that of what use to struggle and work? Crouched on the floor before her canvas she looked up through the skylight at a star, and soft tears moved slowly down her cheeks, tears for herself and for Gloria and for all the unfruitful love and labour in the world.

CHAPTER III

EVER since her conversation with Dorothy Winslow, Ruth had wondered whether it would not be better if she had taken painting and composition instead of portrait painting in the morning. But she didn't like to give up the portrait painting and she knew that if she suggested attending one of the evening classes Gloria would object that she was working too hard. Of course she was her own mistress, but it wasn't pleasant to meet with opposition nevertheless.

She spoke to Dorothy about it.

"You can't get everything in a year, and it all counts. I don't think one can tell exactly what one's forte is until one has studied for some time. Better keep on as you are. Certainly don't give up the portrait class. Bridgelow is wonderful," Dorothy had assured her, "and you may not get a chance to study under him again."

It seemed to Ruth that she was living a sort of double life, her hours among the art students were so separate from her life with the people at the house on Gramercy Square. And in a way she was not actually a part of either life. Among the students she felt a certain reticence, because they were most of them, at least the ones she had met, very

obviously poor. They were paying their own way by working at things far removed from art. One of the girls painted stereopticon slides for illustrated songs, and some of the boys worked at night as waiters. They lived in studios and cooked their own meals, and Ruth was ashamed to let them know exactly where or how she lived. She heard their chatter of parties to which she had not been invited, and she could not control the feeling that she was inferior to these people because she had an assured income.

The morning following the opening of Terry Riordan's play Ruth had left the house without seeing Gloria, and the thought of her aunt as she had last seen her, was with her all morning. In the brief time between classes she was glad to join the group of students who always hurried to a little restaurant on Eighth Avenue for a bite of lunch, or a "bolt of lunch" as Nels Zord called it. Nels was a Norwegian, possibly twenty-five years old who spent every other year studying. He was supposed to have a great amount of talent and he sometimes sold things—seascapes mostly, small canvases of a delicacy that seemed incredible in view of his huge, thick hands. When he was not in New York, he went on long voyages as a sailor before the mast, where he satisfied his muscles with hard work and his soul with adventure and gathered material to be painted from half finished sketches and from memory when he returned to

New York. He had gone to sea first as a boy of fifteen, from his home in Seattle and always chose sailing vessels from preference. He had two passions, art and food, and had never yet been known to give a girl anything but the most comradely attentions, which was, perhaps, why he was so much sought after by them.

Ruth, Dorothy, and Nels walked together to the lunch room. All of the students were talking about the water colour show that was to open at the Academy the following Tuesday. On Monday evening there was to be a private view, and Nels Zord, by virtue of being an exhibitor was one of the few students who would be admitted. He was permitted one guest and had surprised every one by inviting Dorothy Winslow. She told the news to Ruth as they walked along.

"I didn't," said Nels with what seemed to Ruth unnecessary rudeness. "You invited yourself, and I hadn't asked any one else. Might as well take you as any one."

"Far be it from me to care how I get there," said Dorothy with perfect good nature. "It's a shame that Ruth can't go too. You've never been to a private view at a big show like this, have you?"

"No, and I'd love to go, but I suppose there's no chance."

"I'll tell you what; I think I know how you can get it," said Nels. "I know a chap, old fellow, one of the patrons. He always goes and he's always

alone. I don't see why he wouldn't take you—he's not one of those old birds who goes in for young girls—not old enough I guess—and you're quiet looking and everything. You know he ought to be proud to take you," he ended up in what was for him a burst of enthusiasm, but Ruth was rather inclined to be offended.

"Really, I'd much rather not go than to go in that way—" she began explaining.

"Now don't be foolish," interrupted Dorothy. "You know that any one of us will go in any way possible. It doesn't matter how we get there so long as we do get there. At the private view we'll have a chance to really see the pictures and to hear the criticisms of the people whose opinion counts. Do be sensible and come with us."

"Of course I want to go, just as all of us do," admitted Ruth, "but not badly enough to go as the unwelcome guest of a man I've never met."

"You don't understand," said Nels. "He won't be taking you there, exactly. It's just this way. He's allowed one guest, I've never known him to bring one. Some one might just as well use that guest card. He's a friend of mine and I'll ask him for it. If it's necessary for him to appear with you, we can all meet at the Academy. By the way, a private view is awfully dressy—have you got evening things?"

Ruth wasn't surprised at the question. She knew that lots of the students considered themselves

lucky to possess one costume suitable for the street. She knew two girls who shared a studio and one evening gown together. They wore the gown turn about, and couldn't both accept an invitation to the same party. Knowing these things she nodded without comment.

"Of course, she has everything," explained Dorothy.

"Well, I haven't you know—always put on my Latin quartier clothes, things I never dared wear in Paris, but they go big enough here, especially when worn by an exhibitor," said Nels.

"I don't know what I shall wear—probably borrow a frock from some one."

"Would you—do you think you could wear one of mine?" asked Ruth hesitatingly.

"D'you mean to say you've got two?" asked Dorothy with mock amazement.

"If you think it can be arranged without too much trouble, I would like to go," admitted Ruth.

"Simplest thing in the world," said Nels who was rather proud of his influential friend.

The conversation about the water colour show drove thoughts of Gloria out of Ruth's mind until she started homeward from the League. She wondered how Gloria would look, whether she would dare speak of the happening of the night before, whether Gloria would be shut in her own room and refuse to see her.

Gloria's voice called joyously to her as she opened the door. She was standing in the midst of innumerable garments, frocks, hats, shoes, lingerie, gloves, all in a state of wild confusion, while George dragged huge trunks into the few empty spaces on the floor, and Amy stood by, trying to fold and classify garments as Gloria threw them about.

"I'm going to Palm Beach—want to come along?" she called cheerfully.

"I can't very well leave school, Gloria, but if you want to close the house I can go to an hotel for a few weeks. How long are you going to be gone—when are you going?"

"I don't know. I just know I've got to get away for a while. I hate New York. I'm going as soon as I can get packed, but there's no reason for closing the house. You're here and Billie will be here at least until she gets an engagement, and I'll leave George and Amy. I just thought if you wanted to come you might."

"Of course I'd love to go; I've never been to Florida, but I can't leave school just now. Can I help?"

"Dive in; the sooner the trunks are packed the sooner I go."

"Have you bought a ticket and made reservations?" asked Ruth practically.

"Time enough for that later. I can't go today anyway you know. I just thought of it an hour ago."

"If Miss Mayfield will pardon a suggestion from me," said George, "I would suggest that Palm Beach will be very dull just now— It is too early for the season to have begun and the hotels will be quite deserted."

"That's just why I'm going—I'm fed up with people," said Gloria, and George subsided into sullen silence.

One of the few things about Gloria that Ruth did not quite like was her treatment of her servants. She was quite as apt to ask the advice of George or Amy as one of her friends, and in consequence they often offered it unsolicited. With Amy this course was all right. She would storm and scold in true Southern negro fashion and take the resulting scolding in good part, but if Gloria reprimanded George he would retire sullenly to the lower regions of the house and pack his luggage and then appear with great dignity to offer his resignation. Whereupon Gloria would beg him to stay and he would consent to do so with apparent reluctance. Once Ruth had seen her put her hand on his arm with a familiar gesture while she pleaded with him to stay. The sight sent a cold shudder over her. To Ruth there was something sinister and repulsive about George, and she was almost sure that her feeling of distrust and dislike was fully returned.

He went out now in answer to the ringing door bell, and returned with Terry Riordan, who stood looking in with wide, questioning eyes. Ruth

watched his face intently, keen to see whether he would show regret at Gloria's going away.

"Glad I got here in time to say good-bye," he said, smiling. "Who's going away?"

"I thought George told you over the 'phone that I couldn't see any one today," said Gloria. "I'm packing to go to Palm Beach, and now that you've satisfied your curiosity, perhaps you'll run along."

"Not at all; I'm going to stay to argue with you. In the first place why go away and in the second why go to Palm Beach when there are so many interesting places to go?"

"I'm going away because I'm tired of playwrights and actors and actresses, and Fifth Avenue and Broadway, and if you have any better place than Palm Beach to suggest, I will be very glad to go there—only don't say the North Pole, for I've been packing summer clothing and don't want to do it all over again."

"Can't you say anything to her?" he asked, smiling at Ruth.

She shook her head, answering him with her eyes and again she had the feeling of a secret understanding between herself and Terry.

"Haven't you any control over this house, George?" he asked perching on top of one of the trunks and lighting a cigarette.

George made no answer, but Amy grinned her delight. With her mistress gone George would as-

sume more upper servant airs than ever and she would have no court of justice to which she could refer in time of domestic strife.

"Please get off that trunk, Terry; there are chairs to sit on," said Gloria, drawing the red flower of her lip under her white teeth.

"How can I sit on a chair when there are hats and boots on every one?"

"Here, I'll clear one for you," said Gloria, and sent a hat sailing across the room.

Ruth would never dare throw a hat across the room, no matter how much she felt like it. She watched Gloria in a perfect passion of admiration that half drowned the sharp pain in her heart because she knew that Terry also saw Gloria's beauty and felt the charm of her.

"If you really must go away, and I can understand that too, for I'd like to get away myself, why not take a sea voyage—that's the real thing in rest cures. Go to San Francisco by rail and then take one of those boats that run to Hawaii and Samoa and on to Sydney if you don't want to stop at Samoa. Let me see, five days to San Francisco, eighteen days to Sydney, not counting a long stop-over in Hawaii and Samoa, and by the time you return I'll have a comedy written for you,—a comedy in which the entire plot rests on the heroine's being not less than six feet tall—"

"Don't tease me, Terry—it isn't fair—you've been writing that comedy for three years now—if

you only would write it I wouldn't care even if I had to play opposite a giant from a circus—”

She was near tears, so near that Ruth could hardly restrain an impulse to go to her and throw her arms about her, when Terry evidently with the same impulse went to her and did throw one arm about her shoulders. Ruth saw now that they were exactly the same height.

“ My dear girl, I'm not teasing. The comedy is half finished now, only I wanted to keep it for a surprise, and you won't play opposite a circus giant. If necessary I'll play opposite you myself and wear French heels.”

“ Don't believe him, Ruth.” said Gloria, smiling now. “ He's always promising to write a comedy for me, but he doesn't mean it.”

“ Wait and see,” said Terry. “ You do believe me, don't you Ruth? ”

But Ruth, gazing hopelessly on the splendid beauty of her aunt, and seeing Terry's arm across her shoulder could not answer.

“ I'll give you four weeks more to make good, Terry ” said Gloria. “ Clear all the junk away, Geor ; I've changed my mind. I'm not going away for a while.”

Terry Riordan forebore to laugh, but his eyes again sought Ruth's in secret understanding.

“ I think I'll go up and work a while before dinner,” she said. It was better to leave them alone, and she must work! she must work! she must work!

Pursuant to her conversation with Dorothy Winslow in which she had announced her intention of painting landscapes with figures, Ruth had begun a new canvas—a corner of the park with two children playing under the trees. She had been trying to get an effect of sunlight falling through green leaves. It was badly done. She could see that now. Besides, she didn't want to paint children. She painted them out with great sweeps of her brush. They were stiff, horrid, complacent little creatures. Instead she would have only one figure, a shabby, old woman crouching on a park bench, and she would take out the sunlight too. A thin mist of rain would be falling and the sky would be murky with a faint, coppery glow where the sun sought to penetrate through the clouds, but the chief interest of the picture would centre about the figure of the old woman, holding her tattered cloak about her under the uncertain shelter of the trees.

If only she had the colour sense of Nels Zord—she would get it in time. It was only a question of more work and more work. Would Terry Riordan really play opposite Gloria in the new comedy? The play was the task that Gloria had set him and when it was produced Terry could claim his reward. She would go to the wedding and no one would ever guess that her heart was broken. Afterward she would live in retirement and paint; or perhaps she would travel and one day be thirty-five years old and beautiful with a strange, sad

beauty and men would love her, but she would refuse them all ever so gently.

She worked steadily for almost an hour and then she began to wonder whether Amy would have a very good dinner and how many would be there. Perhaps Terry Riordan would stay. And she decided to put on a new dinner frock that she had bought and wondered if she could dress her hair as Gloria did, and tried it, but found it unsuccessful and reverted to her own simple coiffure.

When she went down she found that Terry had indeed stayed for dinner and Gloria had changed to a gorgeous gown and Billie Irwin, who had come in late from the hair-dresser's, had acquired a splendid aureole of golden hair in place of the streaked blond of yesterday, and Philip Noel was trying out some new music and they had all promised to stay to dinner and afterward there was a play that they simply must see, at least the second act. There was really nothing worth listening to after the second act, and all conversation about going away or about the new comedy seemed to be forgotten.

"You'll have a surprise on Sunday morning," Terry told her.

"What kind of a surprise?" asked Ruth.

"Can't tell now; it's a secret. Gloria knows, though."

"It's a very nice surprise," said Gloria.

Ruth glanced quickly from one to the other.

Perhaps they were going to be married and would announce the fact on Sunday.

"Can't I guess?" she asked, trying to imitate their gay mood.

"No! you'd never guess," said Gloria, "but it's really a wonderful surprise. Only you mustn't ask questions—you'll find out at breakfast Sunday morning and not a moment sooner."

CHAPTER IV

SUNDAY breakfast was a ceremony at the house on Gramercy Square. Then Gloria broke away from her rule of breakfast in bed, and clad in the most alluring of French negligées, she presided at the coffee urn in the big dining-room, while around her were ranged friends expected and unexpected in harmonious Sunday comfort. There was a delightful untidiness about the entire room that was particularly cheering—ash trays with half-smoked cigarettes on the white cloth and Sunday newspapers scattered at random by casual hands. Conversation for the first half hour was confined to nods and sleepy smiles, but when the second cup of coffee had been poured people really began to talk. There was always, when the weather permitted, a fire in the grate, and after breakfast there was an hour of intimate chat in which all the stage gossip of the season was told and analysed, and careers were made and unmade.

Breakfast was at eleven o'clock, but Ruth had been up for hours, working away in her studio at the top of the house. At eleven she came down, for George was intolerant of late comers. Gloria, Billie Irwin, Terry Riordan, and John Courtney were already there. They raised their heads from

their newspapers and greeted her with smiles, for Gloria considered it the worst taste possible for any one to speak before she had had her first cup of coffee, and particularly she disliked "Good-morning" spoken in a cheery tone.

"There is no such thing as a good morning," she always averred. "Morning is never good, except for sleep."

At the moment that Ruth entered George placed the coffee urn on the table and Gloria proceeded to pour the cups, looking very lovely with the dusk of sleep still in her eyes.

Ruth thought it very odd to be at a table with four other people none of whom spoke a word. No one else seemed to mind, they all devoted themselves to their breakfast with the same earnestness that a few moments before had been bestowed on the Sunday newspapers.

"Now, Terry, you can give Ruth her surprise," said Gloria presently.

Ruth had almost forgotten but now she remembered, seeing them all look at her beamingly, as if she had done something very nice.

Terry reached down to the floor and picked up a section of newspaper. It was the theatrical section, Ruth saw, even before he handed it to her, and then, that it contained a story about "Three Merry Men," with a photograph of the leading woman and grouped around it the sketches that Ruth had made caricaturing the players. The sketches had not

been signed but under them was a printed caption, "Sketched by Ruth Mayfield." She stared at the page for some moments, realizing that they were all looking at her and expecting some sort of an outburst. Finally when she sat silent, Billie Irwin, less sensitive than the others, spoke:

"Isn't it wonderful, Ruth—we're all so proud and glad for you—to think of seeing your work reproduced, and you've only been in New York a few weeks." She put her plump hand on Ruth's shoulder with an impulsive gesture.

Ruth restrained an impulse to throw it off. She still kept her head bent, instinctively hiding her eyes until she should gain control of their expression. She realized that every one there thought that Terry had done a fine thing in getting the sketches printed, that Terry himself thought he had done a nice thing. It would be impossible to explain to these people that she considered such work beneath her—that she, the future great painter, did not want to dabble in cartooning. But to them she was only an obscure art student. She must say something soon—her silence was past the limit of surprise.

"How good of you, Mr. Riordan," she said at last. "I had no idea that you were going to do this when you took my sketches. It's quite wonderful to see them—to see them in a newspaper like this—"

"My word," laughed Terry, "I believe that

Ruth doesn't really like it at all, though I meant well, I did indeed, child, and though you don't know it, cartooning is quite as much art as painting, and quite as difficult if one had not the particular genius for it. I gave the sketches to the *Sun* critic and he was quite enthusiastic. I dare say you might get a chance to do it right along if you wanted to."

"Ruth is an ungrateful little wretch if she isn't both pleased and proud," said Gloria, smiling fondly at Ruth.

"I am pleased and grateful," protested Ruth, "but I don't want to be a cartoonist, not until I'm quite sure that I can never be a painter."

"Better far be a clever cartoonist than a bad painter," said John Courtney, "though I understand just how you feel. As a young man, when I first entered the profession I wanted to be a great comedian—I still think I could have been one, for I have a keen sense of humour, but it was not to be, I was, you will pardon me for speaking of it, I was too handsome—my appearance forced me to be a romantic hero—"

He passed one white hand over his grey, curled hair, as he spoke, with a gesture as one who should say, "you can see that I am still handsome and can judge for yourselves of my youth."

"Your fatal beauty was your ruin," said Gloria. He smiled good-naturedly.

"No, not my ruin, I have done very well, but I did want to be a great comedian, and I've never seen

a comedian who did not secretly long for tragic rôles, but 'there is a destiny that shapes our ends—' What is that quotation?"

"'Rough-hew them as we will,'" Ruth finished for him. "I quoted that myself to a girl last week and she answered me by saying that she intended to do a lot of rough-hewing."

"Still, even if you do want to paint I think you ought to follow this newspaper thing up," said Billie Iriwn who was a bit vague as to the trend of the conversation. "Your name is in quite large type and nothing counts like keeping one's name before the public. If only I had not been so retiring when I first started!"

Just here George came in with a letter which he laid beside Ruth's plate.

"It just came by hand," he explained.

Ruth lost no time in opening the large, square envelope, addressed in a precise, old-fashioned, masculine hand.

Inside was a square engraved card of admission to the private view of the water colour show at the Academy on Monday evening. With it was another card with the name Professor Percival Pendragon engraved on it, and the words "compliments of" written above.

"Oh, isn't this splendid!" she exclaimed, passing the contents of the envelope to Gloria. "You know all of the students are crazy to go to the private view tomorrow night, but it's awfully exclusive and

only the members of the Academy and the exhibitors have cards, but each one is permitted one guest. Nels Zord, one of the student exhibitors is taking Dorothy Winslow and he's asked this man, a friend and patron of his, to send me his guest card. Hasn't he got a queer name? You know I've never met him at all. He must be really fond of Nels—quite an old chap I suppose and perhaps I'll meet him at—"

Just then Ruth was stopped by the expression on Gloria's face. She was holding the card away from her as if it were something dangerous and her face had grown quite pale, her big, blue eyes staring out with an expression that Ruth could not analyse.

"What is it—are you ill?" In her fright Ruth has risen from her place at the table and moved to Gloria's side.

Gloria waved her away with a movement of her arm, and seeming to recover a part of her composure began to smile.

"It's nothing at all, Ruth," she said. "I was just startled for a moment—you see Professor Percival Pendragon is—was, my husband."

Ruth sank back into her chair.

"Then I suppose—perhaps you'd prefer—I can send the card back to him and tell that I am unable to use it."

"Not at all," said Gloria, twisting her round, red mouth in the whimsical way she had. "If you haven't met him he doesn't know that you are a

relative of mine and you needn't tell. Besides he's an awfully good sort really. I always did like Percy. I didn't know he was in America. The last I knew he was in Oxford, associated with the observatory there. He'll probably talk to you about the great star map."

"The great star map?" questioned Terry.

"Oh, I don't know what the thing really is," said Gloria. "Something that the astronomers are working on now. It takes about twenty years to make one, but it's no particular use to them after it's finished. They just make it with great work—but that's merely a rehearsal. Their children make another one, which I suppose is the dress rehearsal; and their grandchildren make a third, which is I suppose the *première*. Then they compare their map with the one made by their parents and grandparents and by some process discover that the planets have moved. They have a wild hope that they may discover where the planets have moved and why, but if that doesn't materialize the great-grandchildren's children make a new star map, devoting their entire lives to it, and some time, two thousand years from now, perhaps, some grey-whiskered old man some place will know something exact about the stars, or will not know something exact about the stars, as the case may be."

Every one except Ruth laughed at this description. She felt that these people with all their years must be in some ways younger than herself.

"They are working for posterity," she said reprovingly. "All great art and science is like that."

"Yes, but you mustn't expect player folk to appreciate anything but the transitory in art," said John Courtney. "It is the tragedy of the profession that the art of every one of us dies with us. The tones of Gloria's marvellous speaking voice will not be heard by our descendants. Booth is nothing but a memory in spite of his statue out there in the park. It is the life of a butterfly."

Courtney had used his deepest emotional voice in speaking, and despite custom and knowledge of his many harmless affectations, Billie Irwin shuddered and looked pained.

"Butterflies are very beautiful at least," said Terry, reflecting in his face the concern that Ruth also felt as she noted that Gloria was still looking quite pale, with a strained expression in her eyes as if she were seeing things far removed from the breakfast room. She determined to again ask her aunt if it would not be better to give up the private view, as soon as she had an opportunity to speak with her alone.

The opportunity did not come until late that afternoon, and then Gloria shrugged her shoulders in a careless manner and laughed at Ruth.

"Certainly not, foolish child. He doesn't know that you live with me. I doubt if he even knows that I am alive. I've been off the stage so long and besides he never goes to the theatre. This art

thing must be a new fad with him. Still he must have noticed the name. Even Percy can scarcely have forgotten my last name. Only don't tell him about me. Don't let him know that you are a relative, and don't let him come to the house."

"The others are coming—Dorothy and Nels. I'm going to lend Dorothy a gown."

"Do they know anything about me?" asked Gloria.

"No; you see I've been afraid to tell them just how happily I am situated. They are all so poor and I've been afraid that they'd not take me seriously if I told them that I have never been hungry or afraid of a landlord or any of the interesting things that seem to be common in their lives. They rather look down on the students that have an allowance from home, so I've never told them anything about myself. Probably I shan't meet Mr. Pendragon at all. If he had wanted to meet me he would have come with Nels instead of sending the admission card, don't you think so?"

"Perhaps," said Gloria.

Then curiosity overcoming delicacy, Ruth asked her the question that had been in her mind all day.

"Which one is Professor Pendragon?"

"Which one?" Gloria's eyebrows went up in surprise. "Oh yes, I know what you mean, which one on my list. Percy was number one. I was very young when I married Percy and very ambitious. It was—let me see—eleven years ago and we were

married just one year. I haven't seen him for nine years or heard of him for at least five, and if you love me, Ruth, you won't let him know who you are or you won't mention me. You see I've been married twice since then and I don't want to meet Percy. It would be painful to both of us. He can't have any interest in me, and certainly I have none in him."

Her voice grew hard as she spoke the last words and her mouth set in a line that made her lips look almost thin, but her eyes were not hard. Some deep emotion looked out of them, but whether it was pain or hate, Ruth could not decide.

She could understand that Gloria would be embarrassed at seeing her first husband, especially in view of the fact that he had had two successors, and that Gloria was contemplating a fourth marriage. As Ruth's own admiration for Terry Riordan increased she found it increasingly difficult to believe that Gloria would reject him, so the fourth marriage seemed quite possible.

Gloria was going to dine out that night and they were together in her room where she was dressing. Her auburn hair fell over her shoulders and Ruth decided that now she looked like the pictures of Guinevere in "The Llys of the King." Ruth knew that Gloria had been disturbed by the knowledge that her former husband was in New York and that she might meet him at any time, but she did not seem to be averse to talking about it, and Ruth was

one of those persons, who, seemingly shy and reserved, actually so about her own affairs, could yet ask with impunity, questions that from any other person would have seemed prying and almost impudent. This was really because Ruth never asked out of idle curiosity, but because she had a real interest. Her aunt was to her a fascinating book, the pages of which she must turn and turn until she had read the entire story.

"Had any of the people this morning ever met Professor Pendragon?" she asked.

"No; that is no one but George—I acquired George in London, you know, just about the same time that I married Percy. Husbands come and husbands go, but a good servant is not so easily replaced, so I've managed to keep George, though he hates New York."

"Then," continued Ruth, more to herself than to Gloria, "it was not Professor Pendragon who gave you this house."

"No, as I told you, I don't think he even knows that I'm in New York. I didn't know he was here. I was fond of Percy and naturally I don't let him give me anything, because that would have given him pleasure and I wanted to hurt him—"

In the mirror she caught the shocked expression in Ruth's eyes, and turned swiftly to face her.

"Of course you think all this is terrible, but after a few years you'll understand, not me, but something of life itself and of how helpless we all are.

I know that you have a very clearly defined plan of life—certain things that you will do—certain things that 'could never happen to me.' I know because we're all like that. And then one day, utterly without your own volition, knowing that you're doing the wrong thing, you'll do and say things that simply aren't written in your lines. Do you suppose that at your age I planned to love a human observatory that observed everything except me, or that I expected to divorce him and marry a tired business man who expected to use me as a perpetual advertisement for toilet preparations, or that I expected when I divorced him that I'd do it all over again with a man more lifeless than his family portraits? You don't know what you're going to do when you start out. I know 'ist that much now—that I don't know. I may commit matrimony again tomorrow."

"But didn't you love any of these men?" gasped Ruth.

"Of course—I loved Percy, and Percy loved the stars—perhaps that's why he married me. I was a star of a kind at the time."

"Then why—"

"Oh, I don't know; I think the final break came because of Eros—Isn't that the bell? Do run and tell Terry that I'll be with him in a minute. I wonder why he will persist in always being on time?"

It was Terry. He was trying to engage the dignified George in conversation.

"Hello—you look as if you'd been reading fairy tales," he exclaimed.

"No, just talking to Gloria," said Ruth. "She'll be down in a few minutes."

"It must have been an exciting conversation from the size of your young eyes."

"We were talking," said Ruth, "we were talking about—about Eros."

"The God of Love?" asked Terry.

"If you will pardon me," said George, "Eros is also the name of a small planet discovered in our solar system in the year 1895."

Completing which amazing piece of information, George silently departed, leaving the two staring after him.

CHAPTER V

RUTH had intended asking permission to have Dorothy and Nels to dinner on the night of the private view, but if she did that they would learn that her aunt was Gloria Mayfield and there was every chance that Nels would refer to that fact in talking to Professor Pendragon, for Ruth had already discovered that the art students were ardent celebrity seekers and Gloria Mayfield, though she had not appeared on any stage for three seasons, was still something of a celebrity.

She compromised by eating an early dinner with Dorothy at the little restaurant on Eighth Avenue, at least Dorothy called it dinner, though it was eaten at tea time and both girls were too excited to care what they ate. Then they went home to dress. It was the first time that Ruth had taken any one of the students to her house and she wondered just how she would avoid telling Dorothy about her aunt.

George opened the door for them and they went on up to Ruth's room without seeing any one else, though Ruth could hear voices from the drawing-room.

"This doesn't look like a rooming house," said Dorothy.

"It isn't. I live here with friends. What do you think of my work room?"

"Great!—warm, too. There isn't any heat where I live and I have to use a little oil stove, but it's expensive. You know I don't think much of that—one might as well be frank—" She was looking at the canvas Ru'h had on her easel. "Nels and I were talking about it yesterday. We think you ought to follow up the cartoon thing. You know they make a lot of money, cartoonists. You could take it up seriously, you know—"

"But I don't want to take it up seriously. I don't want to be a cartoonist. I want to be a landscape painter, and if you will allow me to be frank, too, I don't think that you are in a position to judge whether I have talent or not."

Ruth had been very much surprised to find that her friends at school seemed to think that she had achieved something by having her sketches in a Sunday newspaper. What she had thought would make her lose caste among them had in reality given her distinction, but it had had another effect also. If she was a caricaturist she could also be a painter, they reasoned, and less frankly than Dorothy, Nels Zord had expressed the opinion that she would never be a great painter.

"Better be a successful cartoonist than an unsuccessful painter," he had said.

She had made no protest until now and Dorothy looked at her in amazement.

"Don't be angry. I didn't mean anything, only it's always a pity when any one has a real talent and then insists on some other method of expression. Of course you may be a great painter. As you say, I'm not a critic and besides you haven't been studying long. Only the painting is all a gamble and the sketches are a success right now if you care to go on with them."

"So are your fashions if you care to go on with them," said Ruth, still hurt.

"Speaking of fashions, let me see the frock I'm to wear," said Dorothy, changing the subject with more abruptness than skill.

"They're in my other room," said Ruth. "You can have anything you want except what I'm going to wear myself."

Then followed two hours of dressing and redressing. There were only two gowns to choose from, but Dorothy had to try both of them many times, rearranging her bobbed hair each time, and finally deciding on the blue one because "it makes my eyes so lovely and Nels is crazy about that blue."

She was so interested in her own appearance that she forgot to ask questions about the friends with whom Ruth lived and long before Nels called for them, Ruth knew that Gloria would have gone out for she was dining with the Peyton-Russells. Mrs. Peyton-Russell had been a chorus girl who after she married John Peyton-Russell had the good taste to remember that Gloria Mayfield had befriended her,

the result being that Gloria was often invited to dinner parties at their place in town and had a standing invitation to whatever country place happened to be housing the Peyton-Russells, all invitations that Gloria often accepted, though she complained that Angela Peyton-Russell took her new position far more seriously than she had ever taken her profession. She was almost painfully respectable and correct. She dressed more plainly than a grand duchess, and having no children, was making strenuous efforts to break into public work. One of the most amusing of her activities, at least to Gloria, was in connection with a drama uplift movement.

Nels Zord came promptly at half-past eight, dressed as he had threatened, "like a musical comedy art student." His wide trousers, short velvet jacket and flowing tie created in the mind of Ruth much the same wonder that Dorothy's unaccustomed elegance created in the mind of Nels. Only Dorothy herself was unimpressed by their combined magnificence. To her everything was but a stepping stone on the upward path of her career.

"Don't I look spiffy, Nels? And aren't you going to make sure that I meet Professor Pendragon, and be sure and tell him that I do portraits and then I'll do the rest. If one can't make use of one's friends, of whom can one make use?" The last addressed to Ruth.

"I wouldn't miss the opportunity of letting him meet you for anything," agreed Nels. "Only do

try and be a little bit careful, Dot, you are strenuous, you know. Anyway you'd have met him without asking. He seemed curious to meet Ruth. Asked how she looked and if she was tall and beautiful, and seemed awfully disappointed when I told him that she was only short and pretty. Are you all ready? There's the cab waiting."

From somewhere George appeared to open the door for them, and as Ruth paused to wrap her cloak more closely about her bare shoulders, his soft, lisping voice whispered in her ear:

"Take care what you say to Pendragon, Miss."

She nodded and followed Nels and Dorothy into the cold, outer air. In the cab Nels and Dorothy chatted of the exhibitors—great artists whom they knew by sight, while Ruth to whom they were only names, listened in breathless admiration.

When they had arrived and had left off their wraps, Dorothy protested:

"Do we have to go down the line, or can we duck to the left?"

"No nonsense like that; remember you're with an exhibitor, and besides Professor Pendragon may be waiting for us. We can pay for the privilege of looking at the pictures by breaking through the line of receiving dowagers. It's only fair."

"Oh, very well—but it's really awful, Ruth. Lots of the students just duck the line and slip in at the left, but I suppose we're too dignified tonight."

Professor Pendragon was not waiting for them, but the long line of dowagers was. If Dorothy had not been with her, Ruth would merely have looked at them as a long line of middle aged and elderly women in evening dress, but Dorothy saw them with far different eyes. She knew the names of some of them, and whispered them to Ruth while they waited to follow some people who had arrived before them.

"Just look at the third one from the end—the one with the Valeska Suratt make-up on the Miss Hazy frame—"

And then Ruth looked puzzled.

"You know Miss Hazy in 'Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch'—I say, wouldn't you think she'd choke with all those beads—the one with the neck like a turtle. The ones with the antique jewelry are from Philadelphia—you can tell them with their evening cloaks on, too. They always have evening cloaks made out of some grand, old piece of tapestry taken from the top of the piano—"

Then Nels led them forward and in a very few seconds they had passed the line of patronesses, thin and stout, there seemed to be no intermediates, and were free to look at the pictures and talk to their friends.

Not for the world would Nels have dashed immediately to his own picture, though he knew to a fraction of an inch just where it was hung. But gradually they went to it, hung on the eye line and in the honour room, and there the three stood, the

girls telling Nels how proud they were, and Nels, gratified at their praise, yet half fearing that some one would overhear, with the blood coming and going in his blond face until he looked like a girl despite his heavy shoulders and the big hands that looked more fitted for handling bricks than for painting delicate seascapes in water colour.

Other people seeing their interest in the picture came and looked at it also. The "outsiders," as Dorothy called them, standing up as close as their lorgnettes would permit, the artists, standing far off and closing one eye in absurd postures, while murmurs of "atmosphere," "divine colour," and other phrases and words entered the pink ears of Nels like incense in the nostrils of a god.

So much engrossed was he in his little ceremony of success that he did not see Professor Pendragon approaching, though Dorothy and Ruth, without knowing his identity, were both conscious that the very tall, distinguished looking man was watching them, Ruth even guessed who he was before he laid his hand on Nels' shoulder and spoke. It was not alone that he was tall—very tall even with the slight stoop with which he carried his shoulders; it was his face that first attracted Ruth's attention, a keen, dark face with a high bridged nose and eyes from which a flame of perpetual youth seemed to flash. Yet it was a lined face, too, full of unexpected laugh wrinkles and creases and there were streaks of grey in the hair.

"Well, Nels, you can't complain of how the picture was hung this time." His voice was like his face, poetic and with a hidden laugh in it.

Nels turned, flushing redder than before.

"Professor Pendragon, we've been looking for you. I knew you'd turn up here sooner or later and just waited. Here is Dot, I mean Miss Winslow, and Miss Mayfield."

"Thank you so much for letting me use your guest card. It was very kind of you, Professor Pendragon, and I'm having such a good time."

"Not at all! I was delighted to be able to make such good use of it. Have you seen Alice Schille's children or Mary Cassatt's charming pastel? The women artists are rather outshining the men this year. If Nels can break away from his own work we'll go and see them. Then there's John Sloan and Steinlen, and a Breckenridge thing with wonderful colour." He led them off, smiling down with a funny little stooping movement of his head that in a smaller man might have been described as birdlike. He seemed to know every one and was continually being stopped by men and women who wanted his opinion about this or that piece of work. Ruth tried hard to look at the pictures, but her mind was continually wandering to the people and especially to Professor Pendragon. Dorothy noticed this.

"Don't try to 'ook at things tonight. None of us ever do. The people are too funny. The dragon seems to be on intimate terms with all of them," she

whispered. "Nels tells me that he's a great swell with ever so much money. I wish you could mention that I paint portraits. If I could get him to sit it would be a start. You mention portraits and I'll do the rest."

Much embarrassed and in great fear that Dorothy's whispers would be overheard, Ruth tried to make an opportunity for mentioning that Dorothy painted portraits. Professor Pendragon himself made it.

"What sort of work are you doing, Miss Mayfield?" he asked.

"Nothing now, I'm just a student, but I hope to do landscapes. Dorothy is to be a great portrait painter."

"You know I'd love to paint you, Professor Pendragon. You have such an interesting face—you have really," she ended as Nels laughed.

"Some day when I have lots of time—and thank you for saying that my face is interesting! Or perhaps I can do even better and get some beautiful woman to sit for you. Wouldn't you like that?"

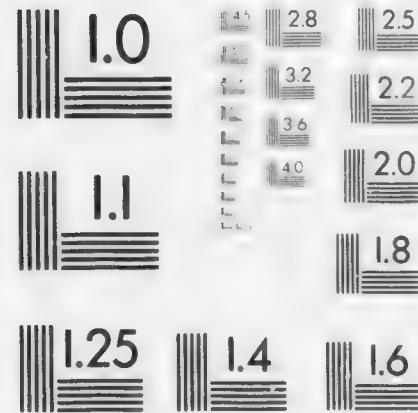
"No; I'd rather have you," said Dorothy, raising her large blue eyes with ingenuous confidence.

"There's a very interesting picture in the 'morgue,' by a new artist of course, that I'd like to have you see, Nels," He broke off, for Nels had been drawn away by some fellow students and Dorothy had followed him, leaving him alone with Ruth.



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"Never mind; perhaps you'll be interested, Miss Mayfield."

Ruth thought she detected the faintest trace of hesitancy in his voice whenever he pronounced her name.

"Is New York your home?" he asked.

"It is now. I came from Indiana, but my mother died a few months ago and I am living with friends here."

"How sad; you have no relatives then?"

"No."

His eyes were searching her face and she felt that he must see that she was lying.

"Do you paint?" she asked.

"Oh no, this art thing is a new fad with me—that is of course I've always been interested in beautiful things, but it's only recently that I've been actively interested. I'm afraid I'm a dilettante—rather an awkward confession for a man of forty-one to make, but it's true. I thought I had a career as an astronomer, but I gave that up some years ago, and since then I've tried a bit of everything. One must play some sort of game, you know. It must be wonderful to be like that little girl with Nels. Her game will be earning a living for some time to come—"

Another pause gave Ruth a clue to his thoughts.

"No; I'm not exactly in that position—of course I want to earn money, too, but only because that is the world's stamp of success," she said.

He had evidently forgotten the picture they went to see, for he asked her if she was hungry, and when she said "No,—"

"I thought young things were always hungry, especially art students, but if you're not hungry let's sit here and talk. Nels and Miss Winslow will be sure to find us soon."

"Astronomy must be an awfully interesting study," she said, wondering how any man once having married Gloria could ever have let her go, and why Gloria once having loved a man like this, could ever have sent him away.

"Yes, interesting, but like art it is very long. I sometimes think I would have done better to take up astrology."

"You're joking," said Ruth. "Surely you don't believe in that sort of thing."

"Why not? There's a grain of truth at the bottom of all old beliefs, and it is as easy to believe that one's destiny is controlled by the stars as to believe in a Divine Providence, sometimes much easier. The stars are cold, passionless things, inexorable and fixed, each moving in its appointed round—passing and repassing other stars, meeting and parting—alone as human lives are alone. There are satellites powerless to leave the planet around which they circle and here and there twin stars that seem one light from this distance, but doubtless are really millions of miles separated in space—"

He caught the intent look on her face and smiled:

"No, on the whole I think astrology would not have been any more satisfactory than astronomy, for even there, there is nothing clear cut, 'The stars incline but do not compel.' Just one thing is really sure, one must play with something."

"Here comes Nels," said Ruth.

"Just in time to keep me from persuading you that I am quite insane," said Professor Pendragon. "I was going to show you a wonderful picture in the morgue, but it's too late, Nels, for you'll never be able to find it alone, and I am going to buy it. Some day, if you'll come and have tea with me—all of you—you can advise me about the proper place to hang it."

"We'll do that, but I'll bet I can find it by myself—go ahead and buy it and when we come to your house I'll be able to describe the picture and tell you who painted it."

"Of course, if some one tells you."

"No, not that; if there's anything in the morgue worth your attention, I'll be sure to notice it."

"So will I," said Dorothy. "Come on, Ruth, let's look."

Ruth had been wondering whether Pendragon would go out with them and how she could avoid his going to the house on Gramercy Square, but evidently he was as informal as a student, for he only nodded a careless farewell and strolled off while they went in search of the picture.

CHAPTER VI

RUTH entered the house with her own key, which she had taken, not wanting to keep George waiting up to open the door for her. The house was quite silent and dark, save for one dim light burning in the hall, and this light seemed to illumine a thick blue haze or smoke that floated out enveloping her as she paused on the threshold. At the same moment she was conscious of an almost overpowering odour of incense, something that Gloria never used, she knew. She stood a moment peering through the blue haze until she made out a figure crouching on the stairs, not George as she at first supposed, but Amy, who seldom showed herself in the front of the house. She was huddled up, with clasped arms, weaving to and fro and moaning inarticulate prayers, while her eyes rolled wildly about in her head.

"Amy, what's wrong? Are you ill?"

Amy paused in her weaving and moaning to shake her head negatively.

"Then what's wrong? Is Miss Mayfield ill?"

Again the negative shake.

"I'se waitin' up for yo', Mis' Ruth. I want you to let me sleep upstairs with you all tonight. There's a couch in the room what you all paint. I kin use

that,—please, Mis' Ruth, I'se a dead woman ef you says no."

"What nonsense!" said Ruth, trying to speak sharply and at the same time in a low tone. Amy, for all her agitation, kept her voice almost a whisper and kept turning her head over her shoulder as if she feared that some one was coming up behind her.

"Why do you want to sleep in my studio? Aren't you comfortable downstairs? If you're ill I'll send for a doctor. You'll have to give me some reason."

She saw that the negro woman's distress was very real, however foolish, and laid her hand on her trembling shoulder.

"Doan ask me no questions now—jes let me come," she said rising as if she would accompany Ruth upstairs against her will, and still looking over her shoulder.

"I can't let you come unless you tell me why," said Ruth, her voice growing louder in spite of her efforts to keep it low.

The negress laid a warning finger on her lips and shot a look of such terror over her shoulder that Ruth felt a sympathetic thrill of horror down her own spine and peered into the blackness beyond the stairway, half expecting to see some apparition there. Then struggling as much to control her own nerves as those of the servant, she put both hands on Amy's shoulders and forced her down on the stairway again.

"If there's any real reason why you should sleep

upstairs you can, but you must tell me first what you're afraid of."

The negress leaned toward her, whispering:

"It's him—that devil-man, George; he a voodoo and he's practisin' black magic down there. I cain't sleep in the same paht of the house. I'm goin' to give notice in the mawnin'—please, Mis' Ruth, take me up with yo'—"

For a moment Ruth did not know what to say. She knew that all negroes are superstitious, but looking into the rolling eyes of Amy, there in the midnight silence of the house, she was not able to laugh.

"I'm surprised at you, Amy. I thought you were more sensible. What's George doing? He hasn't tried to hurt you, has he?"

"No, not me, he ain't goin' hu't me—I don't expec' you-all to understand. I don't care whether you understands or not, jus' let me go up with yo'."

"What's George doing?" demanded Ruth again. She would much rather have given consent at once and ended the argument, but she could not control a feeling both of curiosity and nervousness, and was now protesting more against her own fears than those of Amy.

"He tol' me to go to baid. He orders me roun' li'e I was his nigger, and I went, but I could see him through the keyhole—he's in our settin'-room—it's between his room and mine. There's another do' to my room and I wen' right out through it. I didn't

waste no time. But don't you-all try to stop him. He's at black magic—oh-o-o-o-o-o—"

Her tense whisper trailed off into a suppressed wail.

"Come with me," said Ruth with sudden determination. "I'll see for myself."

She started off down the hall, through the thick blue haze which she could now tell was issuing from the servants' quarters, and Amy, protesting, but evidently fearing to remain behind, walked behind her. Ruth had never been in the servants' quarters, but she knew that they had rooms on the first floor, which was partly below the street level. As she passed she switched on the lights in the hall, illuminating the short flight of steps that led below. The door at the bottom was closed. At the top of the steps, Amy caught her arm.

"Don't go, Mis' Ruth—jes' look through the keyhole once. The do's locked—don't knock, jes' look once—"

Ruth shook off her restraining arm, but unconsciously she softened her footsteps, creeping almost noiselessly down the steps, while the black woman waited above. In the silence she could hear her frightened breathing. She had no intention of following Amy's advice, but intended to knock boldly at the door and then to scold George for frightening his fellow servant. She was determined to do that even if George complained to his mistress, but when her foot touched the last step, something

stronger than herself restrained her. She stood a moment with her heart beating against her ribs, and then, Ruth Mayfield, daughter of respectable parents, bent down in the attitude of a curious and untrustworthy servant and applied her eye to the keyhole. She knelt thus for many minutes before she finally rose and came back up the steps controlling by a strong effort of her will the inclination to look back over her shoulder as she had seen Amy do. At the top Amy took her arm and together they walked back through the hall.

At the foot of the stairway she turned her white face to Amy.

"You can come with me if you'll promise not to say anything about this to Miss Mayfield, or to leave for a while at least."

"I'll promise anything, Mis' Ruth, only take me with you—an' I won't tell—I ain't ready to die yit."

"It's all just nonsense, Amy, only I don't want to worry Gloria with it just now. You understand, it's just nonsense," she repeated with lips that trembled.

She slept fitfully that night, waking in the morning to the sound of Amy's knocking at her door. She called to the servant to come in, eager to talk with her again before she had an opportunity to speak to Gloria. She came in with the breakfast tray, looking much as usual and apparently only too eager to ignore the events of the night before. She set the tray down and began rubbing her shoulders.

"I got a misery," she whined, "the wu'k in this house is too ha'ad. They'se wu'uk enough here for foah and only two to do it all. I'se neber wu'uked in a big house like this befo' less they was at least foah kep'. I'se a cook, I is, not a maid, and what not. Nex' thing she'll be askin' me to do laundry."

"Now, Amy, that isn't fair. The house is big, but Miss Mayfield only uses about half of it, and you know she dines out almost more than in. Besides I don't want you to go away yet. If you'll stay I'll ask Miss Mayfield to let you sleep up here all the time. I can tell her that I'm nervous up here so far away from every one and I'm sure she won't mind."

Amy's face beamed with pleasure. "Is you-all goin' speak to her 'bout Go'ge?"

"Not at once—I must have time to think about that, and you must be quiet, too."

"Don' you fret; I ain' goin' say anything ef you-all doan'.

At the door she turned again and looked at Ruth as if she would like to ask a question, but Ruth pretended not to see, and she went out without speaking.

What Ruth had seen could not be ignored, yet she could not go to Gloria and tell her that she had deliberately peeked through keyholes, especially as there was no way of proving that she had seen what she had seen. George did not practise his rites every night or Amy would have long since fled in terror.

The only thing to do was to try and persuade Gloria to discharge George for some other cause, or failing that, to watch an opportunity to show Gloria what she had seen. But perhaps Gloria already knew. That did not seem exactly probable, but Gloria was a strange woman and she said that George had been in her service a long time—before her marriage to Professor Pendragon. Perhaps Professor Pendragon—

Her thoughts lost themselves in trying to unravel the tangled skein of Professor Pendragon, Gloria and her marriages, George and his evident connection with everything. She remembered George's warning whisper of the night before. Pendragon might be able to explain everything to her, but she could not ask him about George without also giving him information of Gloria, a thing she had promised not to do. The night before she had thought that she might go direct to Gloria with her story about George, but in the light of morning it sounded both fantastic and unreal—as foolish as the fears of the superstitious Amy had seemed before she, herself, had investigated her wild story.

She would be late to class this morning, for she had waked late and had dressed slowly with her thoughts. On her way downstairs she passed Gloria's room. The door was open and Gloria was sitting up in bed surrounded by innumerable papers.

"Are you in a hurry?" she called.

"No, not much," which was true, for being

already late, Ruth was wondering whether it would be worth while to try and attend her first class.

"Perhaps you can help me out—can't make anything of all this," said Gloria.

"What is it?"

"Bills and my bank account—they don't seem to match somehow."

She thrust a mass of papers toward Ruth, who sat down on the side of the bed and began to look at them. She picked up an assortment of bills, some of them months old, some of them just arrived, some of them mere statements of indebtedness, others with pertinent phrases attached thereto, such as "An immediate settlement will be appreciated."

Ruth found a pencil and a pad and began to add up the various amounts—they totalled several thousand dollars. The idea of so much indebtedness frightened Ruth. All her life she had been accustomed to paying for things when she got them. Since coming to New York she had discovered that this was bourgeoisie and inartistic, but training and heredity were stronger than environment with her and she still had a horror of debt. However, she tried to conceal her surprise.

"Now, if you'll let me see your check book and your pass book, perhaps we can discover why they don't match," she suggested.

"Here they are—go as far as you like. I never could make anything of figures, except debts," said Gloria.

"But you haven't made out more than half the stubs on your checks—how in the world have you spent unless you've kept some record of it?"

"I don't know—they balance the book now and then at the bank, but I don't know as it's much use. The truth is I really can't afford to keep up this house, even with only two servants."

"Why don't you rent it and then get an apartment and let George go and keep Amy? You could do with one servant in a small apartment and I could pay half the expense—"

"You could not! I thought I made that quite clear. I can't have any one living with me except as a guest—"

"But why?"

"I don't know why, except that it flatters my vanity. Besides I can't give up the house. I've got to keep it whether I can afford it or not. Where would Billie and any number of other people live when they're out of work if they didn't have this big house to come to? I got a note from Ben Stark yesterday. His company broke up in Saint Louis last week and he's coming on here. I wrote that I could put him up until he gets another engagement."

"But Gloria, don't you see that you can't afford to do that sort of thing? You're too generous. No one likes to talk about money, but one must talk about money—it's always coming in at the most inopportune moments and unless we recognize it politely at first it's sure to show up at the worst time

possible later. You can't afford to be always giving and never taking anything from any one. If you'd only let me live here on a sensible basis—it would make me feel much more comfortable, and—"

"It would not," said Gloria. "If I'd known you were going to be sensible and practical and all that sort of thing, I wouldn't have asked you to look at the silly, old bills. And I'm not generous at all. I'm selfish. Generous people are the sort of people who accept favors gracefully—people like Billie Irwin and Ben Stark. Besides we aren't sure yet. I may have money enough to pay all this—only it's such a bore writing checks."

She smiled cheerfully at the thought.

"I'll tell you what—I'll take your book to the bank and have it balanced and then we can find out just what is wrong, and I'll take care of it all for you. I did all that sort of thing for Mother, you know."

"You're a dear, and just to show you that I can help myself too I'm going to do something that I suppose I should have done long ago."

One of Gloria's pet extravagances was having telephone extensions in all the rooms that she herself used. She reached out now to the telephone by her bed and called a number.

"Is Mr. Davis there?" she asked. "Tell him Miss Mayfield wants to talk to him." Then after a pause: "Good morning—you remember you offered me a contract last week. Is it still open?"

Send it over and I'll sign it— Tomorrow? Yes, I can begin tomorrow. Nine o'clock—that's awfully early, but I can do : I suppose if other people do. Yes, thanks. Woman's prerogative and I have changed mine. Tomorrow, then— Thank you— Good-bye."

" There now, I've promised to go to work in the movies and earn some money. Meantime if you can straighten out my financial puzzle I shall be most grateful."

" Have you ever worked in motion pictures before? " asked Ruth.

" No, but we all come to it sooner or later, that is if they'll take us. I haven't any illusions about it. They may not like me at all. Being an actress on the speaking stage doesn't always mean that one can make a picture actress. Half the down and out artists of the spoken drama who scorn the movies, couldn't get in if they tried. But if they give me a contract for a few weeks I'll have that at least, and then if I'm no good I won't have to worry about it any more."

" Has Miss Irwin an engagement yet? "

" No; but she's doing her best, poor dear. It's awfully hard in the middle of the season. Angela Peyton-Russell is going to give a Christmas party at their house in the Berkshires. I'll have her invite you, too. If I work a few weeks in pictures I'll be ready for a rest. By the way, did you see Percy last night? "

Suddenly Ruth had a suspicion that this was the real reason why she had been called in. Gloria's tone was almost too casual and she had asked her question without introduction, abruptly in the middle of other things.

"Yes, I met him and he's awfully nice and good looking, but I told him that I had no relatives and that I am living with friends."

"He asked then?"

"Yes; I suppose the name made him curious."

"He isn't married?"

"If he is his wife was not with him and he didn't mention her. I'm almost sure that he's not."

"Did he talk about astronomy?"

"No—that is yes—only to say that he'd given it up and art is his latest fad."

"Take care you don't fall in love with him, he's very fascinating," said Gloria, smiling.

"I know—why did you divorce him?"

"How should I know?" Gloria frowned impatiently. "Oh, because he was quite impossible—as a husband. All men are."

"I'll take your book to the bank now. I've missed my morning class anyway," said Ruth rising. The weight of all the things she knew and guessed, and did not know, was pressing heavily on her and she longed for some one to whom she could tell everything and get advice. Obviously her temperamental aunt was not the one.

At the door she paused again, making one last effort to simplify her problem.

"Why don't you discharge George anyway and get another woman? I'm sure he must be very expensive."

"You don't like George, do you?"

"No, I don't. He's not like any nigger I ever saw before. Where did he come from anyway?"

"I don't know exactly. He is a Hindoo, half-caste I imagine, or he wouldn't work as a servant, and I found him in London. It was just before I married Percy. George had been working in one of the music halls as a magician and he was ill. I took care of him. His colour didn't matter—he was in The Profession, in a way, you know, and when he got well he offered to work for me and he's been with me ever since, about eleven years. I really couldn't do without George, you know. Percy didn't like him either."

"Why doesn't he go back into vaudeville? He could make more money."

"Gratitude, I suppose—anyway, that wouldn't make very much difference, and so long as I have any money at all, I shall keep George."

"How do you know that he is really a Hindoo?" asked Ruth.

"He told me that when I first found him. You're more curious about George than Percy was. Percy always said he looked like something come to life

from a pyramid, but George never liked Percy and he won't like you if you ask him questions."

"I shan't ask him questions."

"I do wish you hadn't met Percy—he keeps coming into my mind. Did he look well?"

"Very well indeed."

"Happy?"

"That's more difficult—you know I'd never seen him before, so it would be hard to tell. If you—why didn't you let me tell him the truth; then probably you'd have seen for yourself."

"No, I wouldn't. He might have thought that I deliberately tried to see him. Anyway I don't want to see him. I was only curious. Don't speak about him again, even if I ask. I want to forget him."

Ruth went out with thoughts more conflicting than before. One moment she thought she detected in Gloria a sentimental interest in her former husband; the next she appeared to hate him, and apparently there was no hope of persuading her to send George away. She went to the restaurant on Eighth Avenue for lunch, where she met Nels and Dorothy.

"What do you think?" said Nels. "I just heard that Professor Pendragon is ill—paralysis or something like that, and he certainly looked well last night. I can't understand it."

"The news doesn't seem to have affected your appetite any," said Dorothy.

"Certainly not—must keep up steam. Shouldn't wonder if that was why he's ill. He never eats any-

thing much. One can't paint greatly unless one eats greatly."

"When did he get ill, and how?" asked Ruth.

"When he went home from the show last night—It's extraordinary because he's never been troubled that way and he was quite well just a short time before."

Ruth was thinking of George and of all the old tales she had ever heard of the evil eye and black magic. She was thinking of these things with one part of her brain, while with another part she scoffed at herself for being a superstitious, silly fool. If only Amy hadn't persuaded her to look through the keyhole.

"I'm going to go and see him tomorrow afternoon," said Nels. "I'd go today, but I have to work."

"Take us with you," said Dorothy. "He invited us to tea anyway and he seemed to be interested in Ruth."

"One can't go to tea with a paralytic, Dot, besides, he lives in a hotel, unless they've moved him to a hospital. I'll find out and if it's all right of course you can go too."

"Just look at Ruth, Nels; she looks as concerned as if the dragon were a dear friend."

"I'm not at all; it's just that it's sudden—and I was thinking of something else too."

She was remembering Gloria's last words about not mentioning Pendragon's name again. Here

was another piece of information that she must keep to herself. It was so annoying to be just one person with only one pair of eyes and ears and only one small brain. If she could only see inside and know what Gloria was really thinking, what depths of ignorance or wickedness were concealed behind George's black brows, what secret Professor Pendragon knew—and even, yes, it might blight romance, but she would like to know just what Terry Riordan thought.

Did Gloria love Terry or did her heart still belong to her first husband? And what of those other two whose names were never mentioned? If only she could be one of those wonderful detective girls one read about in magazine stories. How simply she would solve everything.

She found Terry with Gloria when she reached home. They were talking interestedly as they always did, with eyes for no one else apparently, and her heart sank. George came in to ask some question about dinner. He did look like something that had stepped from the carvings on a pyramid. His fine features were inexpressibly cruel, yet there was something splendid about him too. He was so tall—taller than Gloria. Tall enough to play—she stopped affrighted at her unnatural thought.

CHAPTER VII

THE entire régime of the house on Gramercy Square had been changed. Instead of rising at eleven o'clock Gloria now left the house shortly after eight, to be at the motion picture studios in New Jersey at nine, so that Ruth seldom saw her before dinner time. The balancing of Gloria's bank book disclosed that she had been living at a rate far in excess of her income—news that did not seem to trouble Gloria at all.

"I'll make it all up again in a few weeks now that I'm working," she said. "If you'll only write out a book full of checks for my poor, dear creditors, I'll sign them and then you can mail them out and everything will be lovely—for a few months at least."

"Yes, but don't you think you ought to regulate your expenditures according to your assured income, Gloria? You know you aren't always working," said Ruth.

"I can't be troubled with that now. Wait until I get tangled up again—something always happens, and nothing could be worse than the pictures; regular hours like a shopgirl, and no audience."

Ruth returned from school to find Gloria not yet

home and the drawing-room empty, except perhaps for Billie Irwin and Ben Stark, a tall, good-natured youth, who had followed hard upon his letter and who was perpetually asking Ruth to go to theatres with him, where he had "professional courtesy" due to having worked on Broadway the season before. If Ruth refused, as she sometimes did, he cheerfully turned his invitation to Billie Irwin, seemingly as pleased with her society as with that of the younger woman.

It troubled Ruth to think of them all, herself and Miss Irwin and Ben Stark, all living here as if Gloria had unlimited wealth, while Gloria went out every morning to uncongenial work to keep up with the expenses of her too large ménage. Only that morning Amy had complained to her of having so many breakfasts to prepare for people who rose whenever they pleased and never remembered to make her any presents. If only George would grow dissatisfied—but he never seemed weary of serving Gloria's impecunious guests, and if he was still engaged in midnight orgies of enchantment Ruth could not know. She dared not repeat the keyhole experiment. She wished that she had not taken Amy upstairs to sleep; then she would have had a spy below stairs. It was foolish of her to connect Professor Pendragon's illness with George, but she could not help it. If she could only have some other opinion to go by—or perhaps when she had seen Professor Pendragon again, her illusion would be

dispelled. Nels Zord had talked with him over the telephone and Professor Pendragon had made light of his illness and said he would be glad to have Nels and the two girls come and have tea with him the following Thursday. He said he was not going to a hospital and hoped to be quite well when they came. If he was well then Ruth could laugh at her superstitious fears. Thursday was a good day for all of them because there was no lecture Thursday afternoon and they could all leave the Art Students' League at half-past four and go together to Professor Pendragon's hotel.

The idea of visiting a man in his hotel, even a man of forty who was ill, and in company with two other people did not seem quite proper to Ruth, but she did not say anything about it, having acquired the habit of taking customs and conventions as she found them. Nevertheless she was quite relieved to find that Professor Pendragon had a suite and that they were ushered into a pleasant room with no hint either of sickness or sleep in it. She even took time to wonder where the prejudice against sleeping rooms as places of ordinary social intercourse first originated.

Professor Pendragon met them, leaning on a crutch, one foot lifted in the attitude of a delightful, old stork.

"It's really kind of you to come," he said, after he had made them all comfortable. "You know I have hundreds of acquaintances but very few

friends, as I have discovered since I became a victim of the evil eye."

Ruth could not restrain a start of surprise and he looked at her, his dark eyes wrinkling with mirth.

"So you know about the evil eye?" he questioned.

"No, I don't. Only I suppose the phrase startled me. What really is the matter?"

"I don't know and neither do the doctors apparently; that's why I call it the evil eye. I came home from the show that night and went to sleep like a good Christian with a quiet conscience, but when I woke I found that my right leg was paralysed to the knee. It was the dark of the moon that night. I know because I always think in more or less almanacal terms—that would be when the evil eye would be most effective, you know; and I'm waiting for the full moon to see if I will not be cured as mysteriously as I have been afflicted."

Nels and Dorothy were listening with puzzled eyes, not quite knowing whether Professor Pendragon was jesting or in earnest.

"You mean all maniacal terms, if you believe such rubbish," said Nels, "and you need a brain specialist, not a doctor."

"I think that's our tea at the door, if you'll please open it for me, Nels, and I promise not to talk about the evil eye in the presence of such moderns as you and Miss Winslow again."

"Why don't you include Ruth in that?" asked Dorothy, as Nels rose to open the door.

"Because Miss Mayfield is not a modern at all; she belongs to the dark middle ages."

"I'm afraid I'm a bit superstitious," admitted Ruth, and then hoping to test his sincerity, for he had spoken throughout with a smile, and also to throw, if possible, some light on the uncanny suspicions that troubled her—"Even if you did believe in the evil eye, who would want to harm you?"

"Please do stop" said Dorothy. "You're spoiling my tea with your gruesome talk. Where's the picture that Nels was to point out and advise you about hanging?"

"That is, perhaps, a more wholesome topic, but we were only joking, Miss Mayfield and I."

"I've found the picture already," exclaimed Nels—"the one with the fat Bacchus—you see I picked it out of all the others—I don't blame you for buying it; it's delightful humour, depicting Bacchus as a modern business man, fat and bald, yet clad in a leopard skin with grape vines on his head, and tearing through the forest with a slim, young nymph in his arms—it's grotesque and fascinating."

"I thought you'd approve," said Professor Pendragon. "Now where shall we hang it?"

"It's all right where it is, unless you have a larger picture to hang there."

"Now, while you're unable to walk around, why

don't you sit for a portrait—you'll never have another time when the sittings will be less irksome. I'd come here and Ruth could come with me as a chaperon, not that I need one, but we might as well be perfectly proper when it's just as pleasant—you know," she continued, slightly embarrassed by the smiles on the faces of Nels, Professor Pendragon, and Ruth. "I'm not looking for a commission at all; I just want to paint you because you will make an interesting subject, and because, if I can hang you—I mean get your picture hung in the Academy, I will get real commissions, just because you sat for me. Now I've been perfectly frank," she finished.

Pendragon held out his hand to her, laughing:

"Any of those numerous reasons ought to be enough," he said, "and if my infirmity lasts long enough, I'll be glad to have you come and help me kill time."

"Better start before next dark of the moon," said Ruth mischievously.

"That gives you only ten more days," said Pendragon.

"You don't really believe in those things?"—Dorothy's blue eyes were wide with distress—"Please tell me the truth; Nels, they're just teasing, aren't they?"

"Of course, you know they are; don't be a silly goose, Dot," said Nels.

"I know they are, but even if they don't believe

in all they say, they believe in something that I don't understand, now, don't you?—confess."

She turned to Ruth, but it was Pendragon who answered.

"If mind is stronger than matter, and most of us believe that now, then an evil thought has power over matter just as surely as a good thought has power, and the power of the evil thought will continue until it is dispelled by good thought. There if you like is black and white magic. I believe that there are people in the world so crushed by fear and wickedness that every breath of their bodies and every glance of their eyes is a blight on all who come near them, and I believe that there are people who are so fearless and good that where they walk, health and happiness spreads round them as an aura, as sunlight on every life that touches them. Does that satisfy you, Miss Dorothy?"

"Oh yes, that's very beautiful, I'm sure," said Dorothy, looking a bit uncomfortable as if she had been listening to a sermon. "When will you let me come for your first sitting?"

"Sunday morning if you like; that won't interfere with your classes, and it's a good day for me too, because I am duller than usual on Sunday."

As they were leaving, Ruth lingered for a moment.

"If you did have an enemy who was trying to harm you, what would you do, Professor Pendragon?" she asked.

"Evil works like good, can only be accomplished with faith; if I had an enemy, I would destroy his faith in his own power," he answered.

Ruth found the entire family, as Gloria called her household, assembled when she reached the house on Gramercy Park. Terry Riordan was among them.

"Please, Ruth, won't you go to the theatre with Terry tonight? He has a perfect passion for first nights, but as an honest working woman I need my rest and I'm too tired to go tonight," said Gloria.

"I'd like to, but—" Ruth glanced in the direction of Ben Stark.

"Oh, don't mind me," said that youth. "The fact that you have refused me three times won't make any difference. I'm accustomed to such treatment from the fair sex."

"Why don't you come with us?" said Terry. "I have three tickets and intended taking both Gloria and Ruth if they would go."

"Please, Miss Ruth, will you let me go with you? I'll walk a few paces in the rear and be a good little boy," said Ben. "You really must be kind to me, because I'm going into rehearsals for another trip to the coast with a company that will probably go at least as far as Buffalo. You'll miss my cheery smile when I am far away."

"Then we'll all go together," agreed Ruth, rather annoyed that Terry should have suggested that Ben go with them. Evidently he considered her too young

to be an interesting companion and would be glad to have another man to talk to. It was perhaps for this reason that when they started out she directed most of her smiles and conversation to the erstwhile neglected Ben, making that young man beam with pleasure, while Terry seemed not to observe his neglected state at all.

"What's wrong, old chap? You are as solemn as an owl and you ought to be as happy as larks are supposed to be, with a real, honest-to-goodness show on Broadway," said Ben.

"It's going off next week," said Terry. "It's been nothing but a paper house for a week, and they're going to try it on the road; I don't seem to have the trick or the recipe for success."

"I'm so sorry; perhaps it will go well on the road," said Ruth.

"Don't feel sorry; it doesn't matter very much; I'll write another. A man must do something and if I grow very successful I might be tempted to stop."

"Yes, one must play some game; that's what Professor Pendragon says."

"That's right, you met Gloria's husband, didn't you? What's he like?"

"Very nice; I'll tell you later all about it."

They were entering the theatre now and Ruth wanted to talk to Terry about Professor Pendragon when no one else was listening. Ben Stark was a jarring note that precluded absolute revealment of

her hopes and fears. Nevertheless she forgot to be annoyed at his presence in the theatre for he amused her with his comments about people on and off the stage and Terry was strangely silent. The play was a particularly inane bit of fluff and seemed to be making a great hit. Ruth could imagine the trend of his thoughts, the discouragement attendant upon doing his best and seeing it fail, and watching the success of an inferior endeavour, yet she envied him, for he at least believed in his own work, and the more she studied and compared her work with that of other students, the more a creeping doubt of her own ability filled her brain.

"I need cheering up! Won't you go to supper with me?" he asked as they passed out of the theatre.

His invitation was addressed to both Ben and Ruth, but Ben, with motives which Ruth understood only too well begged off.

"You know I have to report for rehearsals tomorrow morning, if you don't mind I'll run along."

He evidently thought that Terry would like to be alone with Ruth, and Ruth, realizing his mistake, was yet too timid to protest, even had she not secretly desired to be alone with Terry. She had never gone to supper with a man alone. It would be an adventure, and the fact that she loved the man even though he did not know or care, made it even more thrilling. She bethought herself of her

costume and wished that she were in evening clothes.

"I think I'd better take you some place near home," said Terry. "If we use a cab we can save time, and there won't be so many people downtown and we'll be served quicker. I feel a bit guilty about keeping you out late."

"I'm not a child," said Ruth, pouting.

"I know you're not, but you are—you'll always be one, I hope."

She was about to ask why, but they were entering a cab now and she did not ask. She wanted to ask where they were going, but she did not ask that either. She found herself with Terry afflicted with a strange inability to talk. They rode almost in silence to Fourteenth Street and entered a most disappointing place.

Ruth's idea of supper after the theatre was a place of soft lights and music with beautifully dressed women and flowers, and sparkling wine. She didn't want to drink the sparkling wine herself or even to wear the beautiful gowns, but she wanted to see them.

The place they entered was a low ceiled, dark paneled room with no music visible or audible. There were white spread tables, but the women around them were far from beautiful, the men undistinguished in the extreme—matrons on the heavy order with men who were quite obviously, even to Ruth's untrained gaze, their lawful spouses. Both

men and women were giving more attention to their food, than to their companions and they were drinking—beer.

"It's quiet here and we can talk," said Terry, quite oblivious to Ruth's disappointment, but when they were seated he did not talk.

"Tell me about the new comedy you're writing," said Ruth, remembering the axiom that it is always tactful to talk to a man about his own work.

"No; I want to forget my work and myself. Let's gossip. Tell me about Gloria's husband."

In this Ruth thought she detected the interest of a jealous suitor.

"Professor Pendragon is very charming and very clever and good looking. He is taller than Gloria, and apparently has no particular vocation, for he has given up astronomy. His interest in art he calls a fad; he lives alone in a suite in the Belton Hotel and about ten days ago he became mysteriously paralysed—his right leg up to the knee. That's all I know," said Ruth, "except that he's one of the most fascinating men I've ever seen and I can't understand why any woman would ever give him up. He's almost as wonderful as Gloria herself. I'd like to say that he is ugly and old and disagreeable for your sake, but he isn't."

Terry looked at her uncomprehendingly for a moment and then ignored her inference if he understood it at all.

"That's a lot of information to have collected

all about one person," he said. "They say it was a great love match and that they disagreed over some trifle. They met and were married in London and Gloria got a divorce in Paris less than a year later. Curious his turning up just now."

"Why just now?" asked Ruth.

"Because Gloria is a woman who must at all times have some absorbing interest, and recently she hasn't had one and it's telling on her. She has fits of moodiness, and wild ideas that she never carries out—like the proposed sudden trip to Palm Beach. Two years ago when I first met Gloria she would have gone. If only I could finish my comedy and make it a real success with Gloria in the star rôle—"

"You would really like to do things for Gloria," said Ruth.

"Yes; I'm awfully fond of her. She's been my friend and has helped me ever since I first met her."

"Then, please, can't you persuade her to get rid of George?"

There was an intense appeal in Ruth's voice that surprised Terry more than her request.

"Why? How would that help her?"

"I can't explain it exactly. There are several reasons. One is that Gloria has been living quite beyond her income—I suppose I shouldn't tell these things even to you, but I am worried about her and perhaps you can help—and she simply refuses to give up her big house because it serves as a refuge

for professional people, friends of hers, out of an engagement. Of course all these people think that Gloria has unlimited means or they wouldn't come. She won't even let me help her, though I could quite easily. It's because she really needs money that she's gone to work in motion pictures. I imagine that George is an expensive servant and I thought if we could make her discharge him, she could get some one else for less money. Of course that wouldn't make much difference in her expenses—I understand that—but it would be a start. It's a lot of small economies that count, you know," she said gravely.

"I had no idea that Gloria didn't have lots of money. Her second husband was Darral Knight, a man who had made a fortune in toilet preparations. It was he who gave her the house on Gramercy Square. Then she married Brooks Grosvenor and he settled an income on her when they were divorced. I always supposed that it was ample. Certainly from what I've heard of the man he would have it fixed so that she could not get anything but the income, and even that would be forfeited if she married again."

"The income isn't large, not really large enough to afford such a big house, and Gloria has gone in debt a lot and now she's working to pay it off. You see she'd have enough money if she would consent to live differently."

"But Gloria is not the sort of person who will

ever live differently. I have often wondered how she got by in such a big house with perpetual guests and only two servants, but I suppose she just didn't want to bother with any more. But that isn't the reason you want her to get rid of George, is it? It really wouldn't make any appreciable difference, would it?"

"No—there are other reasons too, but I'm afraid to tell you."

"Something you don't like to put into words?"

Ruth nodded.

"I think I know. I've thought of it myself and I don't like to put it into words either, but I will, so that we can understand each other perfectly—a necessary thing if we are to help Gloria." He paused looking at her, and seemingly trying to gather courage for what he was about to say.

"You think that George is in love with his mistress."

Ruth's horrified face revealed that Terry had put into words something quite foreign to anything in her thoughts.

"Don't look so horrified. it sounds terrible to us—it is terrible, but you must remember that George is a Hindoo, not a nigger, and that he is well educated, and that in many parts of the world, the idea of a black man loving a white woman is not so repugnant as it is here. I wouldn't admit it for a long time myself, but it's the only plausible explanation of a lot of things. Perhaps Gloria has

told you that when she first met George he was a magician mahatma, who had been playing in London music halls and that he had been out of work for some time on account of illness. Out of gratitude, apparently, he offered to serve her. Later when he had quite recovered his health he could easily have gone back to his former work, but he didn't go, though regardless of what Gloria pays him, it must be much less than he could make on the stage. If you've observed too, you will have seen that his attitude, while quite respectful, is never the attitude of a servant, and toward Gloria's men friends his attitude is almost offensively disrespectful, especially when she is not present. He even hates me. I've thought for a long time that she ought to get rid of him, but I can't go to her and tell her what I think, for certainly Gloria doesn't suspect anything like that."

During this explanation, Ruth, recovered from the first shock of his words, was thinking rapidly. All her fears and superstitions came back one hundred fold in the light of Terry's revelation. They gave reason and purpose to what she had seen and what she had suspected. She debated in her mind whether she dare tell everything to Terry.

"But evidently you had something else in mind—some other reason," he continued. "What was it?"

She looked at his grey blue eyes and brown hair, his clear, fair skin and firm chin—he was Western

of the West—he would never understand or believe.

"Nothing," she answered. "I suppose it's just that I sensed what you have said, without ever daring to put it into words even in my own thoughts. Couldn't you try and tempt George back on to the stage?"

"I don't know—I couldn't, because he doesn't like me, but I might get some one else to do it, that is if he hasn't forgotten all his old tricks. Eleven years is a long time, you know."

"Oh, he hasn't—" but she decided not to finish her sentence.

The restaurant was almost deserted now, and Terry bethought himself, with many apologies, of his resolve not to keep Ruth out too late. He would have hurried into another cab, but Ruth protested that it was such a short distance and she wanted to walk. In reality she thought that in the darkness when she could not see his face so clearly she might find the courage to tell him. Yet she walked silent by his side, unable to speak. She was lost in the wonder of being alone with him—he was so tall and wonderful. She looked up at the stars and gratitude filled her heart. It was good to love, even when love was unreciprocated. She pitied women who had never loved, as she did, unselfishly—a love more like adoration than earthly passion. She wanted to help Terry and Gloria. She would rejoice in their marriage. If she could only solve

their problems, she would not care what life held for her after that. It was an exalted mood for a girl of nineteen years, some months and days, and Terry, all unsuspecting, broke into it with words:

"I wish we could arrange to have Gloria and Professor Pendragon meet again," he said. "Pendragon was the big love of her life, and no man ever having once loved Gloria could possibly be quite free of her sway. She made the other marriages just for excitement, I think. I can't imagine any other reason. I'd like to have them meet again. It would be interesting to say the least. I'm horribly unmodern, but I believe that men and women love once and once only."

It seemed to Ruth that there was a note of sad resignation and generous resolve in his voice.

"But I've promised Gloria that I will not let him know anything about her. It's very generous of you to want to—to bring them together."

For a moment Terry did not speak. He seemed to be considering her words and looked at her in a curious way that she did not understand.

"It's not generosity—perhaps only curiosity," he said. "Gloria and I have been such good friends—and I am tremendously fond of her. She is so beautiful and charming and talented, but just now I think she needs something, some one, bigger than her work."

They had reached home, Ruth in a state of exalted pain and happiness. Terry loved Gloria; that was

evident, but for some reason he did not hope to win her. With noble generosity he was hoping only for Gloria's happiness—planning to bring her and Professor Pendragon together. Somehow it seemed that she and Terry were sharing sacrifice—he his love for Gloria, she her love for him. It gave her a feeling of sweet comradeship with him, that almost compensated for the pain of knowing that he did not love her. Perhaps behind her thoughts too there was the faint hope that if Gloria went back to her first husband, Terry might change the object of his affections, but this thought was only half defined, for at nineteen the idea of a man loving twice is very inartistic. To Ruth all real love was of the *Abelard and Heloise, Paul and Virginia* type.

Thus she thought in silence while Terry waited for her to unlock the door. The door opened to her key and she turned to say good-night to him, when her nostrils caught the overpowering perfume of some strange incense, and in the hall she saw the same blue haze that she had seen that night when she found Amy on the stairs. Terry, too, had smelled the incense, and paused, looking at her for explanation. Her heart was beating at a tremendous rate. Here was the opportunity that she had been seeking to secure an unbiased witness. She put her finger to her lips in sign of silence, as Amy had done that night, and drew him with her into the hall. Then she closed the door silently behind them. Without

knowing why he imitated her example in silence. Inside the hall was heavy with the blue smoke and the perfume that seemed to be smothering them.

"Now I can show you why I want Gloria to send George away. He's downstairs now, I think," she was speaking in a low whisper. "I want you to see for yourself. I haven't dared to tell any one for fear they wouldn't believe. He's down there," she pointed. "Don't knock or let him know you're coming—I want you to see everything. Perhaps—I know it sounds a terrible thing to do, but if you could just look through the keyhole—"

She stopped abruptly, seeing Terry's look of amazement at such a request.

"Believe me—it is better to do that—just look once and you'll understand."

She moved toward the rear of the house, tiptoeing noiselessly and beckoning him to follow. At the top of the short flight of steps she stopped again.

"Down there, behind that door," she whispered.

As one preparing to dispel the foolish fears of a nervous woman, Terry advanced down the steps, yet such was the influence of the hour, the strange incense and Ruth's manner that he walked softly. Ruth followed him, but at the bottom Terry did not bend down to look through the keyhole. Before Ruth's frightened eyes he put his hand to the handle of the door, which swung inward at his touch.

A deeper blue haze than that above filled the room into which they looked. In the centre of the room

George was kneeling—about his head a white turban was wound and he was wrapped in a long, black robe on which the signs of the zodiac were picked out in gold thread. Before him was placed an altar, which rose in a series of seven steps. At the bottom a lamp was burning with a blue flame, from which the clouds of incense were rising, almost obscuring what lay coiled on the topmost step which spread into a flat platform—an enormous serpent coiled, with its head lifted from the centre of the mass and swaying from side to side, seemingly in accompaniment to a low monotonous chant that George was singing, while he too swayed back and forth, for some moments seeming not to know that the door had been opened. Ruth could not understand the words of the giant, but from the tone they sounded like an invocation. George was praying to his reptile! Suddenly, as if he had just seen them, he lifted his hands and his voice rose, and the snake reared its head far into the air, so that they could see its darting, forked tongue. Then as George's voice suddenly stopped on a high note the snake subsided again, and George rose to his feet and greeted them.

"Good evening," he said, "I was just practising my box of tricks. You know I used to be a professional magician and Miss Mayfield has asked me to accompany her to the Christmas party in the country to help entertain the guests of the Peyton-Russells. The snake is quite harmless," he continued, picking

it up on both hands and dropping it over his shoulders. "Would you like to touch it?"

"Oh, no, no," said Ruth, drawing back and instinctively clutching Terry's arm. Terry did not accept the invitation either, but to Ruth's surprise he seemed to accept George's explanation of the strange scene as truth.

"We were attracted by the smell of the incense," he explained, "thought it might be fire and we'd better investigate."

"Certainly, quite right." Never had George's voice sounded so silky and lisping and sinister. He stood quite still, seemingly waiting for them to go, the snake coiled round his shoulders. Ruth was only too glad to make her escape and Terry followed her. In the hall he turned to her smiling.

"No wonder you were frightened if that's what you saw, but you see it's quite all right—Gloria knows about it and it hasn't any significance. Of course snakes aren't pleasant things to have in the house, but this one is harmless, so I hope it won't disturb your sleep."

"Do you believe what George said," she asked.

"Of course, why not?"

"Because I don't. He may be practising tricks for the Christmas party—that may be true, but there was no trick to what we saw just now—the snake was real, and the altar and the incense—and George was praying—he was praying to that snake."

"Even so," said Terry. "We're not missionaries

that we should try to convert the heathen. I don't care how many snake worshippers there are in New York."

"It isn't that, Terry—I know it sounds weird, but the night I saw him before, was the night Professor Pendragon was stricken with paralysis—"

She stopped frightened by the lack of comprehension in Terry's face.

"Don't you see if George will worship a snake, he is the sort of person who will pray calamities on his enemies. If he loves Gloria, then he hates Professor Pendragon, because he is the only man Gloria has loved. When Pendragon's name was first mentioned, you remember the Sunday morning I got the card to the water colour show, George was even more concerned than Gloria, and when I went he warned me to be careful what I said. I believe that he is responsible for Pendragon's illness."

Comprehension had dawned in Terry's face, but with it Ruth could see a tolerant incredulity and a wonder that she could believe such nonsense.

"It's reasonable enough that George hates Pendragon, but even if he does hate him and even if he was actually longing for him to be harmed, that doesn't give a prop snake the power to carry out his wishes."

"It isn't the snake; it's the power of George's concentrated thought."

"Thoughts can't harm people," said Terry.

"But they can—thoughts are things and evil thoughts are as powerful as good ones."

She could almost see the thoughts passing through Terry's brain. He was looking at her, assuring himself that she really was sane and had been up to this night quite normal, almost uninterestingly normal, and even while she tried to make her beliefs clear she was conscious of a feeling of exultation because for the first time she was actually interesting the man.

"I've heard of Indian fakirs who could paralyse parts of their own bodies so that knives could be thrust into them without causing the slightest pain, but I never heard of one who exercised such power over another person, but even if that were possible how would it help to send George away? If Gloria sent him away, he could still keep on thinking and worshipping snakes, too, for that matter," he said, smiling.

"Professor Pendragon told me that if he had an enemy who was trying to harm him, he would try and destroy that enemy's faith in his ability to harm. What we must do is destroy the snake first. George worships the snake or some power of which the snake is a symbol. Either way if we destroy the snake we destroy George's confidence in his ability to harm."

"I haven't any objections to killing snakes. In my opinion that's what the horrid beasts were created for, but this particular snake is probably

very valuable—he belongs to the profession and everything."

"Please don't jest about it, Terry; it may be a matter of life and death. If I hear that Professor Pendragon is worse instead of better tomorrow, I will be sure. Then we must do something before it is too late. You must promise to help me."

She laid her hand on his arm and looked up at him with such genuine fear and entreaty in her eyes that for a moment he understood and sympathized with all of her beliefs.

"Of course I'll help," he promised, "but now I'd best go, and you must go to bed and try not to dream of snakes."

CHAPTER VIII

RUTH waited impatiently for the noon hour, so that she might ask Nels what news he had of Professor Pendragon, but when she finally met him he had not seen nor heard from the Professor since the day they all had tea together. On Sunday morning Dorothy was to go to him to begin his portrait and Ruth was to accompany her. Until then she probably would get no news. In the afternoon when she returned to the house she found Gloria there before her, having returned early from the motion picture studios. Terry was there too, reading the last of his new comedy which was now completed. Gloria was enthusiastic about it and Billie Irwin, who had been quite depressed for over a fortnight, was now as cheery as if the contract was already signed, for Gloria had picked out a part that must certainly be given to Billie if she, herself, was to play the lead.

They all talked as if the production of the play was assured, and as if no one but the author would have a word to say about how it should be cast, a thing that seemed quite logical to Ruth until Terry himself explained that he would have very little to say about it, except as to Gloria, and she would be given the leading rôle when the play was produced,

not so much because Terry wanted her, as because she was the only well-known actress who could possibly fit it.

To hear the others talking one would think that the play was going into rehearsals tomorrow with all the parts distributed among Gloria's friends. Even Ben Stark begged Terry to try and hold out one of the parts until he saw how his road tour was coming out, and they were all discussing how the various parts ought to be dressed.

Terry had no opportunity to talk to Ruth alone, but they exchanged significant glances when George appeared with tea, looking so correct and conventional that it was difficult to believe that they had seen him the night before burning incense and kneeling to a snake.

"Any news?" Terry whispered, and Ruth could only shake her head.

When George had left the room Terry ventured to speak of him:

"What's all this 'hat George is telling me about going up to the Peyton-Russells' with you to amuse the guests with vaudeville magic?" he asked.

"Oh, he's been telling!" exclaimed Gloria. "I intended it to be a surprise. He's really quite wonderful, you know, or at least he was quite wonderful if he hasn't forgotten."

"It can't do any harm, my knowing, as I'm not to be one of them," said Terry.

"I'd get you an invitation, if there was the slightest chance that you'd accept," said Gloria.

"You know I'd like to go, just to see George."

"Consider yourself invited then. Angela will ask any one that I tell her I want. They've got loads of room and men are never too numerous even in the trail of the fair Angela."

"Don't you think that George ought to go back to his profession? If he's as good as you say it ought to be easy to get him signed up on the Orpheum circuit. If he doesn't know the ropes here in the States I'll be glad to help him," said Terry.

"It can't be done—the biggest salary in the world wouldn't tempt George away from my service. It's the Eastern idea of gratitude. We had that all argued out ten years ago. I told George that he ought not to give up his career to serve me, but he wouldn't listen to me at all. He said that I had saved his life, therefore it belonged to me. He almost wept at the idea of having to go, and yet I sometimes think that it is my life that belongs to George instead of his life that belongs to me. He is a most despotic servant and tries to rule all of my actions. If my conduct displeases him he inconsistently threatens to leave, but of course he doesn't mean it."

Gloria was smiling, reciting the peculiarities of an amusing servant, but to Ruth her words were ap-

palling. She seemed to see Gloria as a bright plumaged bird, charmed by a snake. Once, years ago when she was a little girl visiting in the country, she had seen a bird thus charmed, circling, circling, downward toward the bright-eyed snake that waited for it. She had been unable to move or help, as fascinated as the bird itself. She felt the same sensation of helplessness now. She dared not look at Terry, but a few minutes later he came to her side and whispered to her:

"Meet me at Mori's tomorrow at five."

She had never heard of Mori's, but she could look it up in the telephone directory. Evidently Terry had some plan. The thought cheered her immeasurably.

The situation in the house was a curious one, for Amy shrank with terror whenever George came near her, at the same time leaping to do his slightest bidding. Ruth, so far as possible, ignored George completely and he never spoke to her directly unless it was absolutely necessary, and Gloria did not seem to either observe or sense that there was a strained atmosphere in the house.

The distrust of George and foreboding of the future descended on Ruth the moment she entered the house in the afternoon and remained with her, colouring all her thoughts until she entered the Art Students' League in the morning. Here she forgot everything in passionate pursuit of art, daily lifting her ambition to higher ideals and daily seeming to

demonstrate more and more her lack of talent for the career which she had chosen.

Seeing her earnestness her fellow students strove to help her, giving her advice and criticism and now and then a word of encouragement, and Ruth, whose confidence in herself was fast slipping, listened to everything, following the advice last received and struggling to "find herself."

The thing that hurt her most was the fact that as yet she had seemed to attract no particular notice from her instructors. In Indianapolis she had been rather important and she could not think that the greater attention she had received there was entirely due to there not being so large a number of students. She longed to ask one of the instructors, but it was hard to do that. They came through, looked impersonally at her work and made brief comments about drawing, proportion, composition, etc. Finally the courage came to her very suddenly in the portrait class one morning. She had come early and was in the front row. Very slowly the instructor, the most frank and vitriolic of all the instructors, according to Nels, was coming toward her. Suddenly she knew that she would speak to him that day. As he stopped from time to time, her courage did not desert her. She waited quite calmly until he reached her side. She rose to let him have her chair, and for some seconds he looked at her work without speaking. Then he began:

"Don't you see that your values are all wrong?"

And the entire figure is out of drawing; it's a caricature!"

Ruth listened almost without emotion. It was as if he was speaking to some one else.

"By the way," continued the instructor, looking up at her suddenly, "didn't I see some work of yours in one of the Sunday newspapers about a month ago?"

Ruth nodded; she could not speak.

"I thought so; I was pleased and surprised at the time to see how much better your work in that line was than anything you have done here. That's what is the trouble with this; it's a cartoon."

"But I want to be a portrait painter; I'm interested more in landscapes. Please tell me the truth. Do you think I have talent—possibilities—will I ever do anything?"

He looked at her, frowning, yet with a half smile on his lips.

"Tell me first, what are you studying for? Are you collecting canvases to take home and show Mother, or do you intend to try for a career—to make a profession of painting?"

"It is my profession—I've never wanted to do anything else—I must be a great painter."

She spoke with almost hysterical intensity.

A shadow passed over the instructor's face.

"It is difficult to say who has and who has not talent. So far I have seen no signs of it in your work here. Unquestionably you have the cartoon

gift, but as for painting—still a great desire may do much. Rome wasn't built in a day."

She had listened attentively, almost hopefully, until those last words. Then she knew that he was doing what Nels would have called "stalling." He did not believe that there was any chance for her. He rose and went on about his tour of inspection, and Ruth sank down into the empty chair. She did not work any more, but sat still, looking at her work, but not thinking of it—not thinking of anything. She was roused by seeing the other students filing out at the luncheon hour. She did not want to see Nels and Dorothy; she would not go to their restaurant, instead she would eat the "cheap and wholesome" lunch offered in the building. There she would be with strangers. She ate something, she did not know what, and returned to her life class, but again she could not work. She was beginning to think definitely now. She had no talent—no future. If she could not be a great artist, a great painter, there was nothing in life for her. She didn't want anything else, not even love. If she could come to Terry with a great gift, she would not stop hoping that he would love her, but to be just an ordinary woman—just a wife. If she was not to be a great painter, then what was she to be? Very carefully she went over every word of the professor. He had admitted that it was difficult to say exactly whether she had talent or not; he had only said that he had discovered no signs of it. Yet he was only one man.

Thousands of geniuses in every field of endeavour had been discouraged by their elders simply because the new genius worked in a different manner from those who had gone before. But that didn't apply to herself. She had no new and original methods. She changed her style of work every day in response to something she had heard or had seen. She had no knowledge, no ideas about art, in herself. Yet all beginners must be swayed by what they saw and heard, influenced by this or that painter from day to day, until they found themselves. Then she wondered if she had a self to find. She was vaultingly ambitious; she was industrious and something of a dreamer, but with all this Ruth was practical. She thought of perpetual students—did she want to become one of them? That was what it meant, following a muse who had not called. Art is not chosen. It chooses its own. Dorothy Winslow was wrong—fame could not be achieved merely by ambition, energy, and determination—neither is genius the art of taking pains, she thought. Sometimes it is achieved with infinite carelessness. The hour was afternoon, class was over and she had not touched crayon to paper. Not until she was on the street, hurrying out to avoid speaking to Nels or Dorothy, did she remember her engagement with Terry. Mori's was on Forty-second Street. If she walked she would arrive at the right time. She was no longer curious as to what Terry would have to say. Gloria and George did not interest her. She was

arrived at branching roads and she must choose. She realized that. Not that she could not keep on with her studies, regardless of whether she had talent or not. She could, for she was responsible to no one. No one counted on her to make good, nor was there any one to warn her against mistakes. She only knew that she did not want to devote her life to something for which she was not intended. She did not want to fail, even less did she want to be a mediocre success. She must live on Olympus or in the valley. It occurred to her that her very thoughts were proof of her unworthiness. If she were really a great artist she would not be thinking of either fame or failure, but only of her work. She was walking rapidly so that she arrived at Mori's before five. She glanced at the watch on her wrist before entering and he was beside her, coming from the opposite direction.

"On time," he said with mock surprise.

"No, I am ahead of time. I just came from the League."

They went in together—a big room crowded with innumerable tiny tables and many people, yet when she found herself seated opposite him, pouring tea, they seemed to be quite alone together. Perhaps it was because the tables were so tiny, perhaps because of the small, soft, rose-shaded light on each one, that she seemed to be nearer him than ever before, both physically and spiritually.

"You were looking quite downcast when we met;

I hope you aren't worrying too much about George," he said.

His tone was friendly, intimate, comforting, inviting confidence.

"No, it's not that. Much more selfish. I was thinking of my own troubles."

"I didn't know you had any."

"Yes, it's art. You know I have thought for years—three years to be exact—that I would one day be a great painter and today I discovered that I have no talent."

"You can't know that; you're discouraged over some little failure. I don't know anything about art, but you've only been studying a few years and that's not time enough to tell."

"Yes, it is—I've compared my work with that of other students and I've been afraid for some time. Today I asked Burroughs, one of the instructors, and now I know."

"But that's only one man's opinion. Just what did he say?—I know the pedagogue-al formula, three w rds of praise and one of censure to keep you from being too happy, or three words of adverse criticism and one of praise to keep you from being too discouraged. Wasn't it like that?"

"No; he just said very frankly that he would not say that I had no future at all, but he did say that if I had any my work at school had never given any indication of it. He said my portraits looked like cartoons, and then he remembered those awful

sketches in the *Express*—" She stopped embarrassed.

" You never will live that down, will you? " said Terry, smiling.

" That isn't fair, I didn't mean that, only it's all so discouraging, to want to paint masterpieces and to be told to draw cartoons."

" Did he tell you that? " Terry spoke eagerly.

" Not in so many words, but that's what he meant."

" Then he rather admired your ability to do cartoons? "

" I suppose so."

" Then why don't you go in for that? One must do something, you know--play some game and that is better than most."

Ruth did not answer.

" If you'd like I dare say you could do theatrical caricatures for the Sunday *Express* every week. It wouldn't take much time. Of course you'd soon get as fed up with the theatre as a dramatic critic, but it would be interesting for a time and you could continue to study, to take time to prove whether or not you have talent. If you say I may, I'll speak to Daly about it the next time I see him."

" I'd like it I think--after all, as Mr. Courtenay said, it's better to be a good cartoonist than a bad painter, and I can always keep on studying. It will not be exactly giving up my ambition, only I won't be gambling everything on it." Then, as if half

ashamed of her surrender, and wishing to change the subject, "But we didn't intend to talk about me, we were going to talk about Gloria, weren't we?"

"Is it absolutely necessary that we should have something very definite to talk about?" he asked, smiling. "Suppose I just asked you to meet me for tea, because."

Was he teasing her, she wondered.

"But now that we are together, because, let's talk about Gloria. I won't know anything more about Professor Pendragon until Sunday. I'm going there with Dorothy Winslow, who is going to do a portrait of him, but in the meantime I'd feel very much happier if he was out of the house, or if not George, at least the snake. Couldn't you kill it, Terry? That might make George so angry that he'd leave. And anyway, the snake is the important thing. Without the snake George would be comparatively harmless. You must kill the snake."

"But, my dear girl, how do you propose that I am to make away with George's little pet? It belongs to George, you know. I don't even know where he keeps it, and if I did it is his property and it wouldn't be legal, you know—"

"I wish you wouldn't laugh at me—"

"I'm not laughing at you. Even if I can't quite believe all the things that you believe, I can still see that the situation is serious, but I can't see how killing the snake would help any. My idea is a bit different and perhaps quite as bizarre in its way.

I've been thinking that we could bring Gloria and Professor Pendragon together again, then he would take her away from George and the snake and save us the trouble of taking George and the snake away from her."

"It sounds good, but there's no way to do it. I've given Gloria my word that I'll not mention her name to him and the other day she even made me promise not to mention his name to her again."

"Even so, there must be other people who know both of them."

"He's only been in America two years—they'd move in different circles, naturally."

"Yes, but circles cross—and look here, those pictures will be coming out soon."

"I don't imagine he goes to the movies, certainly not now that he's ill."

"Yes, but he reads the newspapers; he'll see her pictures."

"But that isn't meeting her. If he's at all like Gloria, he'll be too proud to look her up; besides we may be talking nonsense. How do we know that they don't really hate each other?"

"That's not the worst. People don't usually hate over ten years. They may be utterly indifferent. I realize that possibility, but I don't believe they are indifferent. It's all just guessing."

"The simplest way would be to get rid of the snake," persisted Ruth.

"Yes, I know, but who's to do it, and how?"

"You're to do it, and I suppose that I, being in the house, should plan the means—find out where he keeps his pet and how to kidnap it."

"Even if it has the significance you suppose, what's to prevent him getting a new one?"

"They don't sell them in the department stores, you know," said Ruth, smiling.

"Let's wait until you see Pendragon again before we do anything rash," Terry closed the discussion.

He came home with Ruth, who wondered if Gloria would observe them coming together, and if it might not wake in Gloria some latent jealousy.

"I've persuaded Ruth to take up cartooning as a profession," he announced. His putting it into words like that before all of them seemed to make it final.

"You mean those political things of fat capitalists and paper-capped labouring men?" asked Ben Stark.

"Certainly not," said Terry. "You're horribly behind the times. That sort of thing isn't done. If she goes in for political cartoons at all she will draw pictures of downtrodden millionaires defending themselves from Bolsheviks, rampant on a field of red, or of a mob of infuriated factory owners throwing stones at the home of a labour leader—she may draw a series of pictures showing in great detail how a motion picture actress makes up to conceal the wart on her nose before facing the camera."

"It isn't at all settled yet," said Ruth. "I may

not be able to get a—a job." She hated the word, but pronounced it in a perfect fury of democratic renunciation.

"I don't think there'll be any trouble," said Terry. "There's always a demand for that sort of thing."

Altogether, however, the announcement produced surprisingly little comment from Gloria and her friends. They seemed to take it as a matter of course, like Gloria's going into motion pictures. She had been, despite her fears, rather successful, and had been offered a new contract, which, however, she was unwilling to sign until she knew more about the production of Terry's comedy. If Terry's play really got a New York production, Gloria would be only too glad to desert the camera.

The revelation of Ruth's duplicity to Professor Pendragon was threatened in a most unexpected manner, Sunday morning. First Dorothy called for her at the house, and this time, manifested more curiosity about her surroundings than she had done previously, because this time her mind was not on the more important matter of frocks.

"Who do you live with here?" she asked Ruth, as she waited for her to put on her hat and coat.

Ruth hesitated; she hated deception of any kind, or making mysteries. After all it was very silly of Gloria. If one must leave ex-husbands scattered around the world, one should contemplate the possi-

bility of running across them now and then with equanimity. And then the stupid idea of concealing their relationship. It was all most annoying.

"With a woman who was a friend of my father," she answered at last, but Dorothy was not to be put off so easily.

"I mean what's her name?" she asked with frank curiosity.

"Gloria Mayfield—she's really my aunt," said Ruth with a desperate realization that she might as well speak now as have her secret come out later under less favourable circumstances. After all, Dorothy didn't know that Pendragon was one of Gloria's husbands and she might not mention their relationship to him anyway.

"The actress?" asked Dorothy, with a rising inflection composed of astonishment, envy, and doubt in her voice.

"Uh—huh." She tried not to be pleased at the look in Dorothy's blue eyes.

"She's in pictures, isn't she, now? I saw her picture in at least three newspapers this morning."

"I don't know—I've not seen any newspapers this morning," she answered.

"Will I meet her?" asked Dorothy. She was a most distressingly natural and unaffected person. She always said what she thought and asked for what she wanted without the slightest effort at concealment.

"I dare say you will if you come often enough.

She's asleep now, but she's not at all difficult to meet."

"Perhaps I could paint her," again suggested Dorothy.

"I don't think Gloria could sit still long enough."

Things were developing too rapidly for Ruth. She had known that Dorothy would be interested, but she had not thought that her interest would take this turn, though she might have guessed, for Dorothy looked at everything and every person as so much available material. She worked incessantly with both hands and brain. She didn't just study art; she lived it in the most practical manner possible. She was becoming quite well known as a fashion artist and could have been busy all the time, had she not continued her studies. As it was she did quite as much work as many fashion artists who devoted all their time to it. And she never for a moment let herself think that being a fashion artist today would debar her from becoming a famous portrait painter tomorrow. She was building high hopes on Professor Pendragon.

On the way to his hotel Ruth told her about her decision to go in for cartooning professionally, and she rather hoped that Dorothy would discourage her, but she was disappointed.

"Splendid! You're doing the right thing. You know I don't think you'll ever get any place with painting. Nels thinks that, too, but you have a genius for caricature. Those things in the *Express*

were really clever. Lots of character and good action. You'll be famous."

"Famous!" Ruth put as much scorn as possible into the one word.

"Of course—beginning with Cruickshank there have been ever so many caricature artists in the last two centuries whose names will last as long and longer than most of the painters."

Ruth did not respond to this. She was wondering if after all she might not one day, not only be reconciled to the work destiny had given her, but be actually rather proud of it.

They were expected by Professor Pendragon and were conducted immediately to his apartment, but when the boy knocked at his door, he did not open it as on the former occasion, instead they were met by a white uniformed nurse.

"Professor Pendragon begs to be excused from his appointment. He is very much worse. The paralysis has extended from his knee to his hip. He asked me to say that he will be glad to make good his promise as soon as he is well."

The effect of this announcement was bad enough on Dorothy, who naturally was bitterly disappointed, but its effect on Ruth was much worse. Professor Pendragon's misfortune had fallen upon him on the night that she first watched George, and a repetition of George's ceremonial had brought with it the increased misfortune to him that she had feared. She was eager to hurry away and find an

opportunity to tell Terry of this new development, but Dorothy lingered at the door, expressing sympathy, which Ruth suspected was more for herself than for Professor Pendragon.

Professor Pendragon called to the nurse to let them come in. He was propped up on a chaise longue, with newspapers and the remains of breakfast scattered about on the floor and on a low table beside him. His face was very pale and Ruth thought that he looked as if he had not slept. She tried not to look at some photographs of Gloria prominently displayed on the scattered sheets. Evidently he had seen them, so now he knew that she was in New York, or at least in America.

"I'm awfully sorry to disappoint you and myself. But you see a man can't have his portrait painted in a pose like this," he said. "I can't imagine what's wrong with me, but of course it won't last long. A friend of mine has asked me out to his place in the Berkshires and I think I'll go. Perhaps this may be the result of nerves, and anyway, lots of cold air and altitude and quiet can't do any harm. When I return I'll be very glad to make good, but perhaps by that time you will have so many commissions that you won't have time for me."

"No chance," said Dorothy. "I shall be waiting for you." And then: "How long do you think it will be?"

"You'll know definitely after Christmas eve, next dark of the moon, you know." He was smiling,

the smile that Ruth had grown to suspect hid a serious thought. "Either the paralysis will have crept up to my heart, or it will have gone entirely. I am waiting."

Dorothy laughed nervously.

"What nonsense; of course you'll get well and the moon hasn't anything to do with it anyway. We're awfully sorry that you're ill, and don't forget to let me know when you get back to town."

When Ruth took his hand to say good-bye she thought he looked at her reproachfully, but she dared not meet his eyes. Dorothy was looking down at the pictured face of Gloria that was smiling up at them, but apparently she looked with unseeing eyes, for she did not say anything.

In a way it would have relieved Ruth's conscience if Dorothy had spoken. She might then have discovered whether Pendragon knew of her deception and what he thought. One thing she knew. Professor Pendragon was really facing death—a mysterious, relentless death that could not be overcome or even combated. When he died no one would search for his murderer—no one would believe that his death was anything but natural, and the force that had killed him would still go on through the world, too mysterious and unbelievable for modern minds to compass.

CHAPTER IX

IT was the first time that Ruth had seen Prince Aglipogue, though apparently he was on the most congenial and intimate terms of friendship with Gloria. He was at the piano now, accompanying himself, while he sang in Italian. He had glossy, black eyes, glossy red lips, glossy black hair, smooth glossy cheeks and what Terry described as a grand opera figure. He was a Roumanian, and while he sang magnificently, was a passable pianist and a really good violinist, he was at present earning his living as a painter.

Gloria had finished her motion picture contract and was relaxing. Ruth had just come home from the League and found Gloria, Terry, Billie Irwin, Prince Aglipogue and Angela Peyton-Russell at the house. Ben Stark had at last started out on tour, or he would also have been there. Ruth often thought that her aunt's house was more like a club than a home. Of course Ruth did not immediately learn all the foregoing details about Prince Aglipogue, whom Gloria called Aggie, and the others called Prince. Her information came in scraps gathered from the conversation of the others. She had slipped quietly into the room while Prince Aglipogue was singing and was introduced to him when he had

finished. He bowed with surprising depth and grace for a man with no waist line to speak of, and regarded her out of his glossy, black eyes. He spoke entirely without accent, but constructed his sentences curiously, Ruth thought.

As always when there were many people Ruth did not talk, but listened. Mrs. Peyton-Russell had come to talk over with Gloria the details of her Christmas party. As at present arranged she would have one more man than woman, and it appeared that her party must be conducted strictly on the Ark principle, with pairs. She was deeply distressed. She had invited Billie Irwin in a patronizing burst of generosity, but Billie had also secured an engagement that would take her out of town and could not come.

"I don't know who to have," Angela complained. "Of course there are dozens of people I could ask, but I wanted this to be just our little Bohemian circle—no swank, no society people—just friends."

No one seemed to mind this remark. George had come in with a tea wagon and the Prince was engaged in the, to Ruth, alarming, procedure of drinking whiskey and soda and eating cake. Witnessing this catholic consumption of refreshment she could easily conceive that an invitation to any party under any circumstances, would be welcome to him. As for Gloria, she was accustomed to Angela, and did not mind her airs. Since her marriage Angela had consistently referred to all her old friends as "our

little Bohemian circle," a circle, to which she was constantly reverting for amusement, after unsuccessful attempts to gain access to the more conventional circles described as Society.

"Angela's heart is as good as her complexion," Gloria always said, and that was indeed high praise.

"Just tea, please, Gloria," Angela was saying. "I never drink anything stronger any more—no, no real principle, but people in our position must set an example, you know. Not sweets—I really don't dare, well just a tiny bit. You know there is a tendency to stoutness in our family."

"There is, I suppose, in that, nothing personal," said Prince Aglipogue, hastily swallowing a *petit fours*.

Angela laughed gaily. She pretended to believe everything the Prince said to be extremely clever.

"But that doesn't solve my problem," said Angela. "You are all to come up on the Friday night train. We'll meet you at the station at North Adams. You must be sure and dress warmly, because it's a twenty-mile drive through the hills and while there'll be lots of robes in the sleigh, one can't have too much."

"It will remind me of Russia," said the Prince.

"You'll be sure to bring your violin and some music," said Angela.

Prince Aglipogue assented carelessly.

"I really think it will be tremendously successful," said Angela, "not a dull person in the party,

only John has invited one of his friends—he's coming up early. I forget his name, but anyway I haven't the slightest idea what he's like and he makes my party uneven. Come to think, though, John said something about his being ill—lungs, I suppose, so perhaps he won't want to talk to any one. Anyway I'll try and think of some one congenial before it's too late."

She rambled on, sipping her tea and forgetting her diet to the extent of two more cakes, while George moved in and out among them apparently a model of what a perfect servant could be.

"Of course you'll sing for us," she demanded of the Prince.

"You will inspire my best efforts," he assured her, looking at Gloria.

"And you'll be sure to have some clever stories, Mr. Riordan."

Evidently every one would have to pay for their entertainment. Ruth wondered if she would be expected to draw.

"And the best part of the entertainment is to be a secret."

"I'm afraid it isn't to most of them," said Gloria. "Professional pride got the better of George's discretion and he told Terry and Terry told Ruth."

"What is it?" asked the Prince, evidently fearing a rival attraction.

"It's George," explained Gloria. "He used to

be a music hall magician and he's going to do his tricks for us."

"Oh!" Prince Aglipogue shrugged his fat shoulders.

"You won't be so scornful when you've seen him. He was one of the best and if he hasn't forgotten he'll astonish you. George is a Hindoo, you know, and he doesn't need a lot of props to work with."

"And he is working here as your—as your butler." It was indeed difficult to classify George. His duties were so numerous and varied.

"Yes, Aggie, as my butler, footman, and he will be cook and maid as well, I'm afraid, for Amy has given notice. She's leaving at the end of the week, unless Ruth can persuade her to stay."

"Why Ruth?" asked Terry.

"I don't know. Servants always have favourites and while George is devoted to me, Amy is devoted to Ruth."

"Devotion? Among servants!" Angela threw out her hands in a despairing gesture and then launched forth on a discussion of servants to which no one paid much attention, with the possible exception of Billie Irwin, who listened to every one on every subject, showing her keen attention to their words by sundry nods, smiles, and shakes of the head.

Angela was taking Gloria away with her to dinner and Prince Aglipogue, finally having consumed the last scrap of cake, and convinced that he would

not be asked to come with them, took his departure. Billie Irwin went up to her room to rest, Gloria and Angela went away and Terry also departed, leaving Ruth alone. She rather hated these evenings when Gloria was away and she had to dine alone. Amy usually served her on these occasions, George hardly thinking that one person at the table justified his appearance. She was wondering whether she should tell her not to trouble with dinner and go out, when George came in to take away the tea things. Ruth was almost as much afraid of George as Amy, but she nerved herself to speak to him now, because she questioned whether she would again have such a good opportunity.

"How is your pet?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon," said George, capturing a glass from the piano and a tea cup from the floor with what looked like one movement.

"I mean the snake that you use in your—in your tricks."

"I do not perform *tricks* with the daughter of Shiva."

"But you said you were rehearsing the day Mr. Riordan and I looked in on you?"

"You knew that I was not speaking the truth."

As he talked he went on about his duties. There was in his attitude toward her nothing of the servant. He did not pronounce her name once, but spoke as one speaks to an equal.

"Why should I think that you were speaking any-

thing but the truth? If you were not telling the truth I must speak to Miss Mayfield. I don't think she would like the idea of having a snake in the house."

He put down the cup in his hand and turned to her.

"Miss Mayfield is well aware that the daughter of Shiva is with me. She has been with me since my birth and was with my father before me, and she is sacred."

"George, you ought to be ashamed to believe all that superstition—an educated—" she stopped, the word nigger on her lips—"man like you. It's nothing short of idolatry." She was trying to talk to him as she would have scolded at one of her mother's coloured servants.

"You prefer the mythology of the Hebrews?" asked George.

Ruth decided to ignore this.

"And now you've frightened poor Amy so that she is leaving. That ought to concern you, for it may be some time before Miss Mayfield can find any one to take her place."

"That is of no importance, for on the first of the year the house will revert to its original owner and she will not need servants. She will be travelling with her new husband."

"Her what?" Ruth forgot that she was talking to George. She stared at him wide eyed, unwilling to believe that she had heard him rightly.

His blue lips curled up in a thin smile:

"Certainly—wait and you will see that I am right. She herself does not know it, but she will marry Prince Aglipogue on the first of the new year."

"She will do nothing of the sort—she can't—he's fat!"

Ruth was protesting not to George but to herself, for even against her reason she believed everything George said to her. He shruggd his shoulders, still smiling at her, and it seemed to her that the iris of his eyes was red, concentrating in tiny points of flame at the pupils.

"You are speaking foolishly out of the few years of your present existence; back of that you have the unerring knowledge of many incarnations and you know that what I say is true. Has she not already had three husbands? I tell you she will have one more before she finally finds her true mate. She has suffered, but before she knows the truth she must suffer more. Through the Prince she will come to poverty and disgrace, and when these things are completed she will see her true destiny and follow it."

A mist was swimming before Ruth's eyes so that she no longer saw the room or the figure of George —only his red eyes glowed in the deepening shadows of the room, holding her own. She struggled to move her gaze, but her head would not turn; she tried to rise, to leave him as if his words were the

silly ravings of a demented servant, but her limbs were paralysed. Only her lips moved and she heard words coming from them, or echoing in her brain. She could not be sure that she really made a sound.

"What do you mean?"

"In the whole world there are only two men who are fit to walk beside her—and of those one is slowly dying of an unknown disease. He whom the gods chose will soon be gone, but I remain because I have knowledge. In the *Mahabharata* it is written, 'Even if thou art the greatest sinner among all that are sinful, thou shalt yet cross over all transgressions by the raft of knowledge,' and the *Vedas* tell of men who armed with knowledge have defied the gods themselves—"

He paused and turned on her almost fiercely:

"Do you think that I have renounced my caste, that I have lived with the unclean and served the unclean for nothing—the price has been too high for me to lose—but no price will seem too high after I have won!"

Ruth woke to find herself alone and in darkness, save for the light from the street lamps that shone through the curtained windows. With her hands stretched out in front of her to ward off obstacles she moved cautiously through the room until she found a light to turn on. She felt weak and dizzy, but she remembered everything that George had said. It could not be true—it could not, but with

her denials she still heard George's voice speaking of the raft of knowledge and she half remembered the incomprehensible contradictions of Indian mythology—of heroes and holy Brahmans who had actually fought with gods and conquered, but these men had only won power through self-denial. Possibly George thought that by living as a servant for eleven years he was performing austerities—possibly did not know what he believed. Certainly modern Hindoos did not believe as he did. His mind seemed to be a confused mass of knowledge and superstition, ancient and modern, but one thing he had—faith and absolute confidence in his power, and she remembered some words she had read, when, as a child, she pored over books of mythology instead of fairy tales: "All this, whatever exists, rests absolutely on mind," and "That man succeeds whom thus knowing the power of austere abstraction, practises it."

She was roused from her thoughts by the entrance of Amy.

"Ain' yo' goin' eat dinnah? That voodoo man, he's gone out, an' I saw you-all sleepin' here and didn't like to disturb yo'. Yo' dinnah's cold by now, but I'll warm it up—now he's gone I ain' 'fraid to go in the kitchen."

"I'm not hungry, Amy, and I'm sorry you're going."

"Dat's all right. I ain' so anxious fo' wu'k as that. I don' haf to wu'k with devils. An' yo' bettah

eat. You-all too thin. It's a shame you-all havin' ter eat alone heah while Mis' Glorie go out to pahties. She don' treat yo' like folks. Dat devil man he's hoodooed her. I've seen him lookin' at her with his red eyes."

She went on muttering and returned with dinner on a tray, and Ruth knowing the uselessness of resistance dutifully ate, while Amy hovered near.

"Tell me all about it, Amy. What has George been doing now? I thought you would be satisfied when I let you sleep upstairs."

"No, sir, I ain' satisfied nohow. I wouldn't wu'k heah or sleep heah 'nother night not for all the money in the worl'. Dat man he sets an' sets 'ookin' at nothin' an' then he runs knives inter his hans—an' he don' bleed. He ain' human—that's what."

"I'm sorry, Amy—I don't want you to go and neither does Gloria, but of course we can't keep you. Let me know if you don't get another place or if anything goes wrong. Perhaps later George may go and then you can come back."

"He won't go. One mawnin' you-all will wake up dade—that's what goin' happen."

She shook her head, looking at Ruth with real tears in her eyes. Apparently she thought she looked at one doomed to early death, and Ruth, though she knew the threatened evil was not for herself, had long since lost the ability to laugh at Amy's superstitions.

CHAPTER X

TERRY RIORDAN arranged an interview for Ruth with the Sunday editor of the *Express*, with the result that she found herself promised to do a weekly page of theatrical sketches, beginning the first of the year, and she discovered the unique joy of having real work which was wanted and for which she would receive money. Also she discovered that association with a newspaper and connection with a weekly stipend gave her a prestige with her fellow students which no amount of splendid amateur effort would have won for her. Dorothy and Nels told every one they knew about "Ruth Mayfield's splendid success," and Professor Burroughs congratulated her.

"It is always sad to see a student with a real gift neglecting it for a fancied talent," he said, "and it is equally satisfying when any of our students wisely follow the line of work for which they are fitted. We don't want to turn out dabblers, and too often that's what art students become."

Ruth would have looked forward to the beginning of the next year eagerly, had she been thinking only of herself, for her new work was throwing her much in the company of Terry Riordan, who was taking her to the theatre every night, so that she would

become familiar with the appearance and mannerisms of the popular actresses and actors. Of course he was doing it only because he was such a kind-hearted man and because he wanted to help her, but even Ruth knew that if she had not been a rather pleasant companion he would not have taken so much interest in helping her. His cheerfulness puzzled her. He seemed so brave and happy—but perhaps it was merely the forced gaiety of a man who is trying to forget.

It was not, however, her own affairs that interested her most. Terry had found a producer for his play and despite the lateness of the season, rehearsals for it were to begin in January. Gloria had been offered the leading rôle, and with characteristic perverseness had said that she was not at all sure that she wanted it, information that Terry refused to convey to the manager. This, coupled with the fact that Gloria was now constantly in the company of Prince Aglipogue, made Ruth remember vividly her conversation with George. Her beauty, her restlessness, her changeful moods seemed to increase from day to day. She was always kind to Ruth, but she was very seldom with her. Invitations that a month before would have been thrown away unread were now accepted and Gloria dashed about from one place to another, always with Prince Aglipogue in her wake. His ponderous attentions seemed to surround her like a cage and she, like a darting humming-bird, seemed ever to be struggling to es-

cape and ever recognizing the bars that enclosed her.

Terry and Ruth, returning very late from supper after the theatre, would sometimes find her sitting in semi-darkness, while the Prince sang to her, but in such brief glimpses there was no chance for intimate conversation between the two women. Alone with Terry at the theatre or in some restaurant, Ruth almost forgot the shadow hanging over the house on Gramercy Park. Terry was so gay and amusing, so healthful and normal in his outlook, and wherever they went they met his friends, until Ruth began to feel like a personage. It was all very pleasant. Late hours had forced her to appear less and less often at the morning class, but she was always at the League in the afternoon and she began to wonder whether she would not give it up altogether as soon as she actually began her work for the *Express*. She had tried to tell Terry about her talk with George; but a few hours away from George and his snake worship and the sight of George in his rôle of servant had restored what Terry called his mental balance, and he no longer regarded him as dangerous. He was beginning to be a bit ashamed of even listening to Ruth's fears.

"It's only natural that you should be nervous—that we should both have been a bit impressed, it was so weird and unexpected, but after all George is just a servant, and the snake is probably a harmless reptile, such as one sees in any circus. I do not think that he is a bad servant and that he does not regard

Gloria as a servant should; he's impertinent and disagreeable, if you like, but I don't believe he has the slightest thing to do with Professor Pendragon's illness. How could he?"

He talked thus until Ruth despaired of securing his assistance. Terry had given Gloria a contract to sign, which she persistently refused to consider. Finally he appealed to Ruth about it.

"Can't you make Gloria sign it?" he said. "She seemed keen enough before we found a producer and before the thing was cast, and now that she has the contract before her, she seems to have lost all interest. I can't imagine what's wrong. Of course temperament covers a multitude of sins, but she never was temperamental about her work."

"Perhaps she's decided to really abandon the stage," said Ruth.

They were having supper together—Ruth didn't know where. One of the delightful things about Terry was that he never asked her where she wanted to go. He didn't even tell her where they were going. He just took her.

Terry looked at her in amazement. "Leave the stage?"

"Did it ever occur to you that Gloria might marry Prince Aglipogue?" she asked.

Terry answered with a laugh:

"My dear child, you've thought so much about Gloria and George that you're beginning to think of impossibilities. Gloria wouldn't marry a man like

that, and if she did she'd have to stay on the stage to support him. The house, of course, belongs to her, but the income from her other husband—I forget his name—would certainly stop if she remarried."

"I know; I thought it was preposterous too, but she's always with him, and George told me that Gloria would marry Aglipogue."

"Servants' gossip, or perhaps he did it to annoy you. Did you tell Gloria?"

"No; I never get a chance to talk to her any more."

"If you told her it might make her angry enough to dismiss him. Gloria hates being discussed. Is the Prince going to the Christmas party?"

"Of course; he goes everywhere that Gloria goes. I know you think that I am foolish and superstitious, but I can't help thinking that George has some power over Gloria—that what he says is true—that he's forcing her to marry Prince Aglipogue and that he is responsible for Professor Pendragon's strange illness. The first time I saw George with the snake was almost three months ago—that same night Professor Pendragon became paralysed; the next time was just a month later and at the same time Professor Pendragon's paralysis became suddenly worse. It was at the dark of the moon—"

The last words were spoken almost in a whisper and when she paused Terry did not speak, but sat waiting for her to go on.

"I know George hasn't worshipped the snake since that time, for I've been in the house every night and you can always tell because of the incense that fills the hall and lingers there for hours. Christmas Eve will be the next dark of the moon. I know, for I've looked it up. We'll all be in the Berkshires then, at the Peyton-Russells'. George will be there, too—and I'm afraid—I'm afraid."

Terry still sat silent looking at her with an expression of helpless amazement. His blue eyes were troubled and doubting and she knew that while he did not quite disbelieve her, he was by no means convinced, that her fears were justified. It was all too bizarre and unusual. The only trace of fear in his eyes was for herself, not for Gloria, or Professor Pendragon. She had been bending eagerly toward him. Now she sank back with a little helpless sigh. Instantly Terry's hand reached across the table and caught her own in a comforting grip.

"Tell me what you want me to do, Ruth; I'll do anything. I'll do anything for you—anything in or out of reason. I don't understand all this talk about snakes and black magic, but whatever you want done, you can depend on me."

The blood rushed into Ruth's cheeks in a glow of happiness. Something deeper than friendship thrilled in his voice. For a moment she forgot Gloria, and believed that she was looking into the eyes of her own acknowledged lover. Then she remembered. His words, even his eyes told her that

he did, but it could not be true. For a moment she could not speak. She must think of Gloria first and herself afterward, but she wanted to prolong her dream a little while. Finally she told him what she had decided in her own mind was the only thing that Terry could do for her. She knew that he did not believe that George was menacing the life of Professor Pendragon, or that he was influencing Gloria to marry Prince Aglipogue, but even though he did not love her, he would do whatever she asked.

"I want you to get me a revolver, Terry; I want a revolver—one of those little ones—before we go to the Christmas party."

She did not quite understand the curious "let down" expression on Terry's face, when she made her request.

"You don't want to shoot George or the snake?" he asked, smiling.

"I don't want to shoot any one or any thing unless—anyway I'd feel much more comfortable if I had a little revolver."

"You shall have one; I'll call it a Christmas present; but can you shoot?"

"I don't know. I suppose I could hit things if they weren't too far away or too small."

"If you accidentally kill any of your friends I shall feel morally responsible, but I suppose I'll just have to take a chance. Do you by any chance want the thing to be loaded?"

"Of course," said Ruth, ignoring his frivolous tone.

They went home together almost in silence. Ruth did not know what occupied Terry's thoughts, but she herself was wondering if she could find the courage to ask Terry to save Gloria from George and Aglipogue, by marrying her himself. It was all very well to be unselfish in love, but for some weeks at least it seemed to her that Terry had given up all effort to interest Gloria. If he would only make an effort he might save Gloria from the Prince and win happiness for himself, but despite her generous resolves, she could not bring herself to advise him to "speak for himself."

They could hear Prince Aglipogue singing as she unlocked the door of the house on Gramercy Square. The sound of his voice and the piano covered the opening and closing of the door, so that they stood looking in on Gloria and her guest without themselves being observed. The song was just ending—Prince Aglipogue at the piano, her eyes wide and if she heard the music she did not see the singer. There was a trance-like expression in her eyes and when, the song ending, they saw Aglipogue draw her to the seat beside him and lift his face to kiss her, with one movement Terry and Ruth drew back toward the outer door.

"Guess I'd better go," whispered Terry.

"Yes; you saw George was right. They didn't see us—don't forget my revolver."

She closed the door after Terry, this time with a loud bang that could not fail to be heard and as she turned back she saw, far down the hall, two red eyes gleaming at her, like the eyes of a cat. She wondered if George had been watching too, and if his quick ears caught her whispered words to Terry.

Gloria called her name before she entered the room, almost like old times, but Prince Aglipogue did not seem to be particularly pleased to see her.

"You were singing," she said to him. "Please don't stop because I've come. I love to hear you."

"Thank you, but it is late for more music; and it is late, too, for little girls who study, to be up even for the sake of music."

Even a week ago he would not have dared speak to her like that. He sat staring at her now, out of his insolent, oily black eyes, as if she were really a troublesome child. For a moment anger choked her voice and she half expected Gloria to speak for her, but Gloria was still looking at Aglipogue, the strange trance-like expression in her eyes, and Ruth became calm. If Prince Aglipogue chose to be rude she could be impervious to rudeness.

"I'm not trying to make the morning classes any more, Prince Aglipogue, so I can stay up as long as I like, but perhaps you're tired of singing."

It was Aglipogue who looked at Gloria now as if he expected her to send Ruth away, but she said nothing, sitting quite still with her long hands folded

in her lap, a most uncharacteristic pose, and a faint smile on her lips. She seemed to have forgotten both of them. It seemed incredib!^le that less than five minutes before Ruth had seen her bend her head to meet the lips of the fat singer—*incredible and horrible*.

“Yes, I’m tired—of singing,” said Aglipogue after a pause. He rose and lifted one of Gloria’s lovely hands and kissed it. Simultaneously George appeared at the door with his hat and stick. It seemed to Ruth that under his air of great deference and humility George was sneering at the Prince. Gloria, seemingly only half roused from her trance or reverie, rose also in farewell and seemed to struggle to concentrate on her departing guest.

“Tomorrow,” he said, bending again over her hand.

“Yes, tomorrow.”

He went out without again speaking to Ruth, who waited breathless until she heard the closing of the outer door. Gloria watched him disappear, and then lifted her arms high above her head, stretching her superb body up to its full length like a great Persian cat just waking from a nap.

“What are you doing up at this hour, Ruth?” She spoke as if seeing Ruth for the first time.

“I went to the theatre with Terry, you know, and then we went to supper afterward and I came in fifteen minutes ago. I’m not a bit tired.”

“I am, horribly, of everything.”

"It's only Prince Aglipogue who's been boring you. No wonder you're tired of him. If he'd only sing behind a curtain so that one didn't have to look at him, he would be quite lovely," said Ruth. She spoke thus with the intention of making Gloria tell what she really thought of the Prince. Gloria sank back on her chair by the piano and rested her chin on her folded hands, her elbows on her knees. Unlike most large women she seemed able to assume any attitude she chose without appearing ungraceful.

"You don't like Aggie, do you?"

She was looking at Ruth now with something of her normal expression in her eyes.

"I don't exactly dislike him," said Ruth. "He's all right as a singer or a pianist or a painter, but as a man he is singularly uninteresting, isn't he?"

"He is horribly stupid—I—" Suddenly her expression changed and she was on her feet again, walking restlessly up and down the room: "I'm going to marry him; he's going to South America on a concert tour and I'll go with him—I'm so tired of everything; I want to get away."

Involuntarily Ruth had also risen, bewildered at the sudden change in Gloria's manner. Through the open doorway she could see George standing in the dimly lighted hall beyond, his red eyes gleaming, fixed on Gloria's moving figure. She thought she understood, at least in part, the reason for the sudden change and though she was trembling with the

unreasoning fear that assails the bravest in the face of the mysterious and unknown, she forced herself to move across the room, so that she stood between George in the hall, and Gloria. She could almost feel his malignant gaze on her back as she stood in the doorway, but she did not falter.

"If you do that, Gloria, it will mean that you can't work in Terry's play—It will mean giving up everything—your career and your income. Does Prince Aglipogue know that?"

Gloria paused in her restless walk and looked at her from beneath her troubled brows.

"I don't care about the career; I'm tired of the stage, but what difference will the income make? It's such a little one, you know."

"Still it may make a difference with Aglipogue, and if you give up your career and your income you will be dependent on him. That should make a difference to you."

Ruth wondered afterward where she got all this worldly knowledge and how she was able to say it, with George's eyes burning into her back.

"What a practical child you are; but let's not talk about it tonight. I'm awfully tired. We were going to announce our engagement Christmas Eve, but there's no harm in your knowing."

"Gloria, you can't—you can't marry him. He's fat and selfish and horrid!" In her excitement she forgot George and moved to Gloria's side. "You don't know what you're doing."

Gloria's eyes looked across her, over her head and the trance-like look came back into them.

"When you are as old as I you will know that physical appearance doesn't matter much. I don't know why I'm marrying Aggie, but it seems to be happening. So many things happen—I need a change; I want to travel in a new country. Besides it's all fixed—it's too late now—too late—"

She threw off Ruth's detaining hands and swept past her through the hall and up the stairway, and Ruth did not try to follow her. Somewhere beyond the shadows she knew that George was still standing, his red eyes gleaming like those of a cat. She waited a few minutes to give Gloria time to go to her room and to give him time to retire to his own quarters. She did not want to pass him in the hall, and when at last she also went up, she thought she caught the sounds of suppressed sobs, coming from Gloria's room. It would do no good to stop. In two days more they would be going to the Berkshires and there either George would win in his curious twisted plans or she would defeat him. If only she knew where to find Professor Pendragon. Terry could not help. He was too modern and practical. He couldn't understand, his mind was fresh and clean and honest and western. If she could see Pendragon again she would tell him everything and he might help. She decided to telephone his hotel in the morning and find out, if possible, just where he had gone.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Ruth telephoned Professor Pendragon's hotel she found that he had not left any address and would not be expected back before the first of the year. Her next thought was of Nels Zord. He might know, but much to her surprise she did not see Nels at the League, and sought out Dorothy instead. She found her easily enough, but it was not until she had asked about Nels that she observed that Dorothy's eyes were red and her cheeks swollen as if from recent weeping. It was luncheon time and they were walking toward their restaurant together.

"I don't know where Nels is," said Dorothy. Her voice was almost a sob.

"Haven't you seen him today?"

"I never see him any more—haven't you seen? He's too busy with that Alice Winn girl. Oh, you know her, Ruth, the insipid creature with the carefully nurtured southern accent, who always has some highbrow Russian or Swedish book under her arm, and begins reading it every time she thinks a man is looking."

"I think I know the one you mean, but what about her and why is Nels busy with her and why have you been crying? You *have* been crying."

"I suppose I have; it's most unmanly of me, but I must do something. All men you know are irresistibly attracted to the weakest, cheapest sort of women. They all prefer sham to reality, and they are all snobs at heart."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about men," admitted Ruth.

"Well, I'm telling you about them now. You might as well know. And the better a man is the more he likes imitation women, and Nels is just as bad as any of them, and that's why he's fallen so hard for Alice Winn. First he fell for the high-brow books. He really believes that she reads 'em. Then she told him all about her aristocratic family in Kentucky, who fought and fought to keep her from being an artist, but she must 'live her own life,' even if she had to brave the hardships of a great city with not a thing to live on except the income she gets from home. And then, of course, she scorns everything except real art—she would never stoop to a fashion drawing or commercial art of any kind. Her artistic temperament would not allow it. She is working on a mural—yes, indeed—of course it never has and never will go any further than a rough sketch and a lot of conversation in her comfortable studio, but Nels doesn't know that. He and every other man she talks to believes that she is really working on something big. And then she is *such* a lover of beauty. She must have flowers in her studio at all times. She simply couldn't live

without flowers. And Nels—Nels who never bought me even a bunch of violets at Easter time—is pawning his clothes to buy her roses. I think that's what hurts most. I'm just a practical old thing, and I've never wanted to do anything at all but work with him and for him, and go to dinner with him 'Dutch'—and so you see I am of no value—and she, who has never done a useful thing in her whole life, has completely fascinated him. He isn't worth all this. I ought not to care—I don't care—I'm just plain angry."

Tears were overflowing the blue eyes of the "just plain angry" girl and Ruth feared a public exhibition. They had reached the restaurant and she feared the curious eyes inside.

"Let's not eat here today, Dorothy. You need a change, that's all, so why not take the afternoon off? We could go to your studio. I've never been there, you know. Couldn't we have lunch there?"

"We could buy it at the 'delly' 'round the corner," said Dorothy, her round face clearing a bit.

"And let's buy some flowers first; if Nels shows up we can pretend a man sent them."

"That's 'woman stuff'; I don't think I ought—but—"

"Just for this once," persisted Ruth, leading the way into the nearest flower shop.

"I don't like to have you spend money on me. I don't like to have anything that I can't pay for myself."

"That's selfish, and vain. Perhaps that's why Nels is with Alice."

"I suppose so. You know they're so stupid, men. They believe everything you tell them. I've told Nels what a practical worker I am and how independent I am and he believes me, without ever trying to prove it; and she's told him that she is an impractical, artistic dreamer and he believes that, too, though if he'd only think for just a minute he'd know that she's a mercenary schemer, not an artistic dreamer."

"Do you like these pink ones?"

"Oh, and those unusual pale yellow roses—the combination is wonderful, and the scent."

She buried her nose in the flowers in an ecstasy of delight that made her forget that Ruth was paying for them.

"Now we'll ride down on the 'bus," said Ruth. "But you haven't told me just where Nels is—is Alice Winn pretty?"

Questions of this sort are perfectly intelligible to women and Dorothy answered in her own way as they climbed into the Fifth Avenue 'bus.

"He's gone with her to the Met—to look over some costumes she wants to use in this mural she's supposed to be doing; and of course she is pretty—an anæmic, horrid, little dark-skinned vamp—and she lisps—all the time except when she forgets it or when there aren't any men around. It's not nice for me to talk like this. Probably she's all right,

only she isn't good for Nels. I know that. What I'm afraid of is that she'll use him. Lots of girls do, you know, use men like that. She'll ask his advice about things and before he knows it he'll be painting her old mural for her and she'll sign it, and he'll sit back and let her get the credit for doing it. It's been done before, you know."

"Nels is too sensible for that. He'll wake up before it's gone that far."

"I don't think so; she *is* attractive to men."

They fell silent for a short space, looking out at the grey December streets on which no snow had yet fallen. Now a thin, cold rain began falling, making the pavements glisten, and giving even well-dressed pedestrians a shabby appearance as they hurried up and down—a thick stream of holiday shoppers.

"My room isn't much, but at least I live on Washington Square and that is something," said Dorothy. "I love it all the year round, even now when there aren't any leaves on the trees or any Italian children playing and when this beastly rain falls. I rather like rain anyway, but I'm awfully glad we've got the roses. We'll get off here and walk around to the 'delly' first. It's on Bleecker Street. I'm not supposed to cook anything in my room, but of course I do. All of us do."

Their purchases, though guided by the practical Dorothy, were rather like a college girl's spread. Dorothy lived in an old-fashioned white house on the south side of the square—a house in which every

piece of decrepit furniture seemed to have been dragged from its individual attic and assembled here in vast inharmony. Yet mingled with the 1830 atrocities were a few "good" things, left from time to time by artists and writers whom prosperity had called to better quarters. Dorothy lived at the top of the house in one of the two rooms facing the square.

"You see it isn't really a studio," she explained apologetically. "But it has got north light and the sloping room and that bit of skylight makes it quite satisfactory, and then, too, I face the Square and can always see the fountain and the Washington arch and the first green that comes on the trees in May, and I like it. And just because we're celebrating I'll put a charcoal fire in the grate and we'll make tea in the samovar, but first we must take care of the flowers."

For a few minutes she seemed to have forgotten all her troubles.

"I do wish I had a pretty vase. It's almost criminal to put roses in this old jug. Don't you think the samovar's pretty? Nels did get me that. Wait a minute; I'll show you his studio. It's the next room to this and just like it. He never locks his door."

She stepped out, Ruth following, and pushed open the only half closed door of a room, the exact counterpart in size of her own, but rather more comfortable as to furnishings.

"That's her picture; she must have given it to

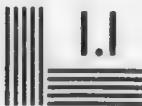


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him last week. I haven't been in his studio for days and we used to have such corking times together—I worked here more often than in my own room and he always seemed to like having me—"

Fearing a return of tears Ruth hastily retreated to Dorothy's room. Besides she didn't feel quite comfortable about entering a man's room during his absence and examining his pictures.

"Let's not think about her; it's just a phase and he'll recover and come back to you," she comforted.

"You make the tea and I'll spread this little table," she continued, removing a pile of sketches to the floor.

In a short space of time there was a real fire burning in the tiny grate, throwing a ruddy glow on the burnished brass of the samovar; in the small room the roses shed a heavy sweet perfume and the two girls chatted cosily over their tea cups. Dorothy smoked a cigarette.

"Cigarettes are a party to me," she exclaimed. "If I could afford to smoke I might not care for it at all, but I can't, so when I want to be extravagant I smoke; it's just a symbol."

Now that Dorothy seemed to have put her grief into the background Ruth was beginning to feel restless. On the following day the party was to leave for the Christmas party. They would arrive at their destination on the twenty-third of December and the imminence of the solution of all Ruth's worries, for either good or evil, made her feel that

she should be at the house as much as possible. Could she have done so she would have followed Gloria wherever she went. Most of all she wanted to find out where Professor Pendragan was stopping; and she ought to telephone Terry again to remind him not to forget the revolver. In her own mind she was not exactly sure what she would do with the gun when she got it.

"I think I'll have to run along," she said.

"Oh, and we were having such a good time. I was beginning to be quite cheered up. Wait a minute; that's him."

Regardless of grammar, Ruth knew that the masculine pronoun could refer to only one person. Down three flights of stairs she could hear a tuneless but valiant whistle.

"I wonder why he's coming home so soon?" continued Dorothy. "I'll shut the door tight so he won't see us. I'm not going to make it easy for him to come back."

She closed the door as she spoke and the two girls waited, trying to keep up a hum of conversation. Dorothy's agitation communicated itself to Ruth.

"Will he come here?" she asked.

"I don't know; he always did before, but now, he may just be coming in to get something and then dash out again to meet her." She walked to the window and looked out:

"There's no one down there waiting for him." She came back to her place at the tiny table.

The whistle had mounted all three flights now, and paused a moment before their door. Dorothy began talking unconcernedly. They heard him enter his own studio. The whistle was resumed and they could hear him moving restlessly about. A match was struck, then another; then silence, then footsteps and a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Dorothy, and the door opened, disclosing a rather shame-faced Nels, who, however, was determined to appear as if nothing had happened.

"Looks like a party," he said.

"It is a party," said Ruth.

"I hope I'm not intruding—I thought Dorothy was alone."

"We were chattering continuously enough for any one to hear us," said Dorothy. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Thanks—I suppose that means, too, that I can come in and sit down and share your gossip, and everything," said Nels, seating himself forthwith on the couch-bed—not a chaise longue—but an ugly bed disguised as a couch—without which no cheap studio or hall bedroom is complete.

Much is written about the "feminine touch" which makes home of the most ordinary surroundings. Ruth thought of it as she looked at Dorothy's room. Perhaps, she decided, artistic women are an exception to this rule. Dorothy had knowledge of beautiful things, more knowledge than the average

woman, but no one would have guessed it from the untidy shabbiness of her studio. Only the bright samovar and the roses, thrown into relief by the firelight, which with the same magic threw dusty corners into shadow and seemed to gild the ugly, broken-down furniture into beauty, threw a glamour over the place now and made it seem quite different from the cheerless room they had entered over an hour before. The rain was bringing a premature twilight which made the firelight doubly welcome. Nels felt the change and looked about him as if in unfamiliar surroundings.

"This is certainly cheery," he said, taking the cup Dorothy offered him. "And roses!" He looked inquiringly at Ruth.

"No, I'm not the lucky girl; some admirer of Dorothy's."

There was an embarrassed pause. Ruth blushed because she had told what in childhood she had called a "white lie"; Dorothy because she accepted the deception that she would not herself have instigated, and Nels for many reasons.

"Whoever he is he's not a poor artist," he said. "I know the price of roses in December," whereupon he blushed more redly in remembrance.

"I thought you were going to spend the entire day at the Metropolitan," said Dorothy, beginning to enjoy the situation.

"So did I," said Nels, and then with a sudden burst of resolution, "I don't mind telling you all

about it—I've been an awful fool, and if you've decided to play with some one else, I don't blame you. We walked to the Met this morning; Alice lives way uptown and I thought it would be a pleasant hike, but when we got there she was quite worn out, and then some fellow she knows came along with a car and offered to take her home and she went; said the walk had made her too tired to work. Of course he offered to 'pick me up,' too, but I preferred to walk and I did—all the way from the Metropolitan to Washington Square—now you know the entire story and can laugh to your heart's content."

But neither of the girls laughed. Nels had evidently learned his lesson, and they were in no mood to increase his discomfiture.

"I wanted to see you to ask if you know where Professor Pendragon went when he left town. He said some place in the country, but I've forgotten where," said Ruth.

"Yes; I got a note from him only this morning. He's visiting a friend of his in the Berkshires. North Adams is the post-office and I've forgotten the name of the house. One of those big country places with a fancy name—wait and I'll get the note from my room."

"He believed that about the roses and now that he's sane again, my conscience hurts," whispered Dorothy when he had left them.

"Let it hurt a bit; I wouldn't tell him," whispered Ruth.

"Here it is," said Nels, returning. "Professor Percival Pendragon, care of Mr. John Peyton-Russell, Fir Tree Farm, North Adams, Massachusetts—some address, but anyway it will reach him."

"Peyton-Russell—he's at the Peyton-Russells'?"

"You know them?"

"Yes, that is, I know Mrs. Peyton-Russell a bit; she's a friend of my aunt's, and we're going there for Christmas—going tomorrow."

"Really; that's splendid, for you can save me writing a note. I hate writing letters. You see Pendragon has been trying to interest this Peyton-Russell in my work. He's one of these men who's spent two-thirds of a lifetime making money, and now he doesn't know exactly what to do with it. He's only been married about two years. I know Pendragon hadn't met his wife, but Mr. Peyton-Russell depends on Pendragon to tell him when things are good, and when Professor Pendragon bought one of my pictures Mr. Peyton-Russell thought he ought to buy one, too. If you'd just tell Professor Pendragon that I don't care what he pays for the picture he has—I let him borrow one to see whether he grew tired of it after it was hung—you'll save me a lot of trouble."

"Of course; did you say Professor Pendragon hasn't met Mrs. Peyton-Russell?"

"He hadn't; but I suppose he has now that he's a guest in her house. John Peyton-Russell used to try to get him out to dinner 'in town, but Pen

wouldn't go; he hates society. But he was ill, you know, and Peyton-Russell was so anxious to do something for him, and promised that it would be quiet—no one out there, and the doctor seemed to think it might be good—he took the nurse along, of course, so Pen went."

"Did he say how he was getting on, in his last letter?"

"Yes; just the same, no better and no worse, but didn't say anything about coming back at once. You're more interested than Dot."

"No; only it seems strange, a coincidence, his being at the same house we're going to."

"While you're delivering messages for Nels, deliver one for me too, Ruth," said Dorothy. "Tell him I'm waiting very patiently to make that portrait and that when it's finished if he wants to sell it to his rich collectors he can. What is he, Nels, a sort of dealer?"

"My word, no—he's a—just a man who happens to have a little money and a lot of appreciation. He's just helping me to success, and helping Peyton-Russell to a reputation as a collector—he is quite disinterested. He could be anything, that man. I don't know why he isn't. Something went wrong some place along his route, I guess, and he just got side-tracked, you understand." He finished with a wave of his hand.

"Now I really must go—one must do a few things even before a short journey."

Ruth was more anxious than ever to get away now, and neither Nels nor Dorothy made any great effort to keep her. Nels was looking at the roses with sad eyes and Dorothy was looking at him with eyes that made Ruth fear that the secret of the flowers would not be kept long. Dorothy was too generous and honest to want to keep up even so tiny a deception.

The one stupendous fact that stood out in her brain as she walked homeward was that Gloria and Professor Pendragon would meet. What would they do? Would Pendragon leave or would Gloria come back to town? What would they say to each other? How amazing that Mr. Peyton-Russell should be a friend of Pendragon's and that Angela should be a friend of Gloria's and that they had never before all met. Still it was understandable. Angela had only been married a year. George would be there, too, and Prince Aglipogue.

She thought of Pendragon's tall, clean-cut figure and fine face, and of Aglipogue's heavy countenance and elephantine form—the contrast. Surely Gloria would see and withdraw before too late. It would be, too, the time of test—the dark of the moon.

CHAPTER XII

IT had been planned that they would all take the morning train together for North Adams, Gloria and Ruth, Terry and Prince Aglipogue and George, but Gloria, despite her motion picture experience, proved unequal to the early rising.

"It's no use," she explained to Ruth, who went to her room to wake her. "I simply can't get up this early in the morning. You go on and meet Aggie and Terry at the station and tell them that I'm coming up on the sleeper tonight. Tell George to go along, too, just as he planned. He's got his ticket and will take care of your luggage and the others', and everything will go just as we planned it except that I'll show up tomorrow morning."

"Suppose there isn't any sleeping train?"

"There will be; anyway as far as Pittsfield. Do go down and tell George and explain to Angela when you get there."

What the trip would have been had Gloria not decided to wait for the night train, Ruth could not guess. What it was was most unexpected. George, being first told, was the first person to show sulky displeasure at Gloria's decision. For a moment Ruth thought that he was actually going to knock on Gloria's door and remonstrate with her, but even

George dared not do that, so instead he preceded Ruth to the station, heavily laden with boxes and bags. He was there when she arrived, as was also Terry, who laughed without any apparent regret at Gloria's revolt.

"I rather hated to get up myself," he said, "but a holiday is a holiday, and it's part of the game to climb out of bed from one to ten hours earlier than usual. Besides, think how tired we'll be tonight and what wonderful sleep we'll get up there in the fresh air. There'll be lots of snow, too. A few flakes fell here this morning, and that means that up in the mountains it will be thick and wonderful. I only hope it won't be too cold."

"Here comes Prince Aglipogue," said Ruth.

The Prince was approaching, his great bulk thrusting aside the lesser human atoms in the station. Ruth was amazed to see that his curious travelling costume was finished by a top hat and wondered whether he would wear it in the train and in the sleigh from North Adams. Over the collar of his fur-lined overcoat his huge face rose, placid and self-satisfied, until he spied the waiting group with Gloria not among them.

"Has she not yet come?" he asked. "The time of the train is immediate; we will miss it."

"Gloria has decided to take the evening train," said Terry.

"Then I also will wait."

"No, she especially asked that we all go ahead

just as planned. Here's George to take care of everything," said Ruth.

"Did she send to me no personal message?"

"No; just that," Ruth took pleasure in watching his face, like a cloud-flecked moon, in its annoyance. "We were all to go ahead and explain to Mrs. Peyton-Russell that Gloria will arrive in the morning."

Just then the gate was opened and Prince Aglipogue, still frowning, followed them reluctantly through it, in front of George and the two porters, who were helping him carry travelling bags.

When they were all comfortably disposed in their seats Ruth began to fear that it would be rather an unpleasant journey, for Prince Aglipogue, unhappy himself, was determined that the others should be, too, if he could make them so.

Only the amused light in Terry's eyes gave her courage. Prince Aglipogue began with a monologue about rotten trains, stupid country houses, beastly cold and the improbability of Gloria's coming at all, and finally worked himself up into a state of agitation bordering on tears, which would have made Ruth laugh had she not been afraid.

"It is unkind of her to leave us this way. For herself she sleeps comfortably at home, while I rise at this unchristian hour for her sake," he protested, more to himself than to the others, for he seemed determined to ignore them. His next phase was one of annoyance at his own discomfort.

Why had not the Peyton-Russells themselves pro-

"I'd buy a drawing-room for him? They were "filthy" with money, and he was not accustomed to travelling in this public n.

that he was only a poor artist. Then he began to worry about his luggage, which had consisted of a single dressing-case. He had entrusted it to George, and who knew what had become of it? He lurched off in search of George some place in the rear cars to find out.

"I'd buy him a drawing-room just to get rid of him, if there was any graceful way of doing it," said Terry. "I'm afraid this is not going to be the pleasantest of parties."

"For more reasons than one," said Ruth. "I discovered yesterday that Professor Pendragon is already a guest of the Peyton-Russells. What will happen when Gloria arrives and they meet? Ought I to tell him, do you think, that she's coming?" She had been thinking of nothing else since her talk with Nels and was delighted to have an opportunity to tell some one.

"This is going to be fun! How do you know, and why do you suppose Angela Peyton-Russell is doing it—some idea of bringing them together again?"

"I don't see any fun in it with that beast Aglipogue along. And Angela didn't know—at least, I'm quite sure she didn't, and doesn't. Professor Pendragon is a friend of Mr. Peyton-Russell and had never met his wife, and I don't think Angela

was going to the house many days before her guests. Mr. Peyton-Russell asked Professor Pendragon there because they're old friends and Pendragon was ill. He thought the air and quiet would be good for him. He took a nurse along. I only learned yesterday from Nels Zord. Unless Angela has mentioned the names of all her guests, it's possible that Professor Pendragon doesn't know she's coming. It's going to be awfully awkward—meeting that way. I suppose one of them will return to New York. Perhaps he would if we warned him. Do you think I ought?"

"You didn't warn Gloria, and you had time for that; I don't see why you should warn her ex-husband. Besides, it isn't such an awful thing. Ex-husbands and wives meet every day in New York and don't seem to mind."

"In a way I suppose I didn't tell Gloria because she told me not to mention his name again, and besides I'd like to have her meet him, providing she didn't make a scene. If she saw him again I don't think she could go on with the Prince."

"Do you think she really is going to marry him?" asked Terry.

"Of course she is, unless you or some one stops her; I don't see how you can stand by quietly and see it done."

"It's no affair—here he comes now."

Their conversation, thus broken off by the re-appearance of Prince Aglipogue, they turned to the

scenery outside, while their heavy companion, turning his back upon them as much as possible, pretended to read a magazine. The snow that had been falling in thin flakes in New York was coming down in great, feathery "blobs," as Terry descriptively called them. At first they did not see any hills, but the movement of the train and the sterterous puffing of the engine told them that they were going steadily upgrade. Now the ground was entirely covered with snow, and the train twisted so continuously around the hills that sometimes they could see the engine curving in front of them, through the window.

"If the snow continues like this, I'm afraid we'll be many hours late," said Terry.

"It won't matter much. We're to be there at two o'clock, and we couldn't be delayed more than a few hours at most, could we?"

"You are pleased to be cheerful," said the Prince. Evidently he had not been so deeply engaged with his magazine as he pretended. "If I am forced on this train to remain a moment longer than is necessary I shall perish."

"They do get snow bound, sometimes, you know," said Terry cheerfully. "It won't be so bad if we're near some town. We can just get off and spend the night in an hotel."

At this the Prince only glared.

"That would be an adventure—I think I'd rather like it," said Ruth,

As if he could bear no more the Prince again departed.

"Presently he'll come back, saying that the air in the smoking car has made his head ache."

"Don't you want to go yourself for a smoke? You know you mustn't think you have to stay here and amuse me," said Ruth.

"I can live ever so long without a cigarette. Besides I'd rather go when he isn't there. I've been thinking about Gloria. Do you suppose she could have found out about Pendragon and isn't coming? It would be like her. She could telephone that she's ill or something."

"I don't think so, but of course I don't know. I don't know anything. Perhaps Pendragon himself has left and all my worry is for nothing. Who'd ever think an aunt could be such a responsibility?"

She said it so seriously and with such a wistful look that Terry restrained his impulse to laugh.

"An aunt is almost as difficult to chaperon as a modern mother," he admitted gravely; "but if the snow doesn't stop snowing she may arrive as soon as we do, and you'll not have to decide whether to warn the professor or not. After all, it's no affair of yours. If they're to meet this way they will meet this way, and it may be rather amusing."

It was difficult to answer him when he talked like that. Probably his words were prompted by bitterness, but it was maddening to have him sit back as if he were helpless to do anything. If only

he would make an effort he could win Gloria away from her present course. He was attractive enough to win any woman. Whether he talked or sat silent, it was good to be with him. Then she remembered the gift he had promised her.

"Oh, you've forgotten! I was afraid you would."

"No, I haven't. You mean the revolver, but I thought it was to be a Christmas gift."

"It was—only I'd like to have it now if you don't mind."

"What are you afraid of—train robbers? This isn't a western movie in spite of the wild nature of our journey."

"I know, but please let me have it. You don't know what a comfort it would be just to look at it."

"All right; just to show you how much I thought of it I didn't pack it at all. It's here in my overcoat."

An eager porter anticipated his movement to reach up to the rack on which the coat had been put, and brought it down for him, and he reached inside the pocket and brought out a box which he put in her hands.

For a moment she did not open it, though he waited, smiling. She was conscious of the movement of the train, of the white flakes flashing past the window, half obscuring the rolling, tree-crowned hills that were fast merging into mountains; of the smell of the Pullman car,—a combination of steam-

heated varnish and dusty upholstery—and most of all of Terry, seated opposite her, a half eager, half amused light dancing in his eyes.

"It's rather an odd gift to give a woman," he said as she hesitated. She opened the box now, realizing herself more than anything else, as the central figure in a little drama. Inside she found a leather case—pale blue leather, more fit to contain jewels than a weapon of defence, and inside that the tiniest revolver she had ever seen, an exquisite thing with gold mountings.

"Will—will it really shoot?" she gasped. "And it must have been horribly expensive—you shouldn't have done it."

Her pleasure was so apparent in her face that her words, which she felt were ill chosen, did not really matter.

"Of course it will shoot; and it's loaded now, so please do be careful. Here, I'll show you how it works—see, you open it this way, and here's the way to empty the shells out—you see there are six—this revolves so that when you've shot one the next one moves into place all ready; it's quite as deadly as a big one, I assure you. Do you think you'll feel quite safe with this?"

"It isn't myself I want to protect," she answered, and just then, she saw Prince Aglipogue returning, and some instinct prompted her to take the gun from his hands and put it back in its case and conceal it behind her. She need not have concealed it, for

Prince Aglipogue was in no mood to observe details. His oily, black eyes were standing out in his head and his face had turned a sickly green. His three chins seemed to be trembling with fright.

"That nigger of Gloria's; he's in the baggage car with a snake—a snake as big as"—he threw out his fat arms as if he could think of no word to describe the size of the snake. His voice was a thin whisper. "You must the conductor tell—it is not allowed. They do not know the trunk's contents—I tell you I am speaking truth—a snake—as big as the engine—will you do nothing?" He grasped Terry's shoulder and shook him.

"It's all right. We know all about it. Miss Mayfield knew he was bringing it. He uses it in his vaudeville stunts."

"I tell you I will not go on—to travel with a snake—it is horrible."

"He's always had it," soothed Terry. "It was in the house on Gramercy Square and never came out and bit any one. I guess you're safe."

"If I had known—" He shuddered through all his fat frame and rolled his eyes upward.

"How is he taking it?" asked Terry. "It's bad enough to travel with a pet dog, but what one does with a pet snake I don't know, and I've been curious."

Prince Aglipogue, frightened into friendliness, broke into a torrent of words from which they gathered that George had the snake in a trunk, the sides

of which were warmed by electricity; that the train officials had no idea of the contents of the trunk, that George had gained access to the baggage car though it was against the rules, and that the Prince, being still worried about his luggage, though he had ~~seen~~ it safely aboard, had claimed the right to follow him there and had found George kneeling beside the opened trunk, from which the snake, artificially warmed to activity, was rearing a head which the Prince protested was as large as that of a cow. As he saw that his hearers were unmoved and that they had known about the snake and seemed to consider it quite ordinary, he was a bit ashamed of his agitation, though by no means convinced that there was no cause for it.

"It's a harmless variety," Terry assured him. "If it were dangerous Gloria wouldn't have allowed George to keep it in the house."

"For the bite, yes; it may be of no harm, but the shock to the nerves! I should have been warned."

"We didn't know that you were going into the baggage car," protested Terry.

"What a terrible journey—look at the snow," said the Prince, sinking into his seat.

They looked out. The movement of the train exaggerated the whirling of the snow until it seemed like a frozen, white whirlwind, sweeping past them, or a drove of wild, white horses whose manes brushed the window panes. Beyond the whirling drift they could see nothing.

Terry looked at his watch. Down the aisle Ruth heard a man asking how late they were, but could not catch the answer.

"Let's have something to eat; even if we're on time, we won't want to wait luncheon until our arrival. A twelve-mile drive through this doesn't sound very alluring, and we may die of starvation on the way."

Terry's glance included both Ruth and Prince Aglipogue.

"Food I cannot face after what I have witnessed," said the Prince. "Perhaps I may have something—a cup of tea—something to keep up my—what did you say—two hours late?"

He clutched the arm of a passing conductor.

"Yes, sir; two hours late now—only two hours," he answered wearily, freeing his arm and passing on. Prince Aglipogue sank back in his chair as if he would never rise again.

"Cheer up; that's not bad. What can you expect with this snow? Two hours only means that we'll arrive about five o'clock and get to Fir Tree Lodge—I think that's what they call it—in time for dinner. Better come on and eat with us."

But Prince Aglipogue shook his huge head sadly, much to the relief of both Terry and Ruth, and they walked out together. Ruth was beginning to feel that she was having an adventure. Something in the restlessness of the other passengers on the train, who were beginning to look frequently at watches

and to stop the train officials every time they appeared, something in the sight of the whirling clouds of snow, the thought of George, some place back there with his strange travelling companion, all contributed to the undercurrent of excitement, and with it was that comforting feeling of security that always comes from looking at storm and snow from a place of warmth and shelter.

Because it was the holiday season the train was crowded and they were compelled to wait in the narrow hallway with other people in line before they could get a table.

"Isn't it wonderful and Christmasy?" she asked, "especially as I've already got one gift; see, I brought it with me. I'd like to look at it again, only I'm afraid if any of the other passengers saw it they might suspect me of being a train robber."

"Yes; you look so much like one. But perhaps it would be just as well not to look at it now. I'm glad you like it."

"It's beautiful, and somehow I feel safer—I mean safer and happier about Gloria now that I have it."

"It's a curious gift to give a girl, but I couldn't exactly imagine giving you—"

"Table for two," interrupted the steward. Ruth wondered what it was that Terry couldn't imagine giving her.

Luncheon was like a party. Terry seemed to be making as much effort to amuse her as he would

have made for Gloria, or perhaps he was so charming that he couldn't help being charming all the time, she reflected. He had the most wonderful eyes in the world, and the kindest, strongest mouth, but she must stop looking at them. Still just for today she might pretend that he was her lover and that they were engaged, and—why not pretend that they were actually married and on their wedding journey? The thought made her gasp.

"Is something wrong? I'll call the waiter."

"No, nothing! I was just thinking—of something."

"Something nice, I hope."

"Yes, no—I don't know." It was horrible to blush like that. If she were only older and poised and sophisticated. Perhaps then she wouldn't have to be pretending. But she would pretend, no matter how bold and unladylike it was to pretend such things and perhaps she would never be with him again in just this way, and it would be nice to remember.

In her reckless mood she surprised herself by saying things like Gloria sometimes. They lingered as long as they dared because it was such a good way of killing time, and when they had finished she made Terry go back to the smoker.

"They ought to have smoking cars for women," she said. It was what Gloria might have said.

"But you don't smoke," said Terry, smiling.

"I know, but I shall learn."

"Not right away, I hope," he said, smiling.

Ruth found that Prince Aglipogue had controlled his nervous shock to the extent of having a very substantial lunch brought to him, which he seemed to be enjoying as much as if snakes had never been created, but he showed no more disposition to be sociable than before, for which Ruth was grateful. It would have spoiled her illusion that she and Terry were travelling alone together. Even she did not think he was gone long. He came back looking rather sober.

"Would you be very much frightened if we didn't reach North Adams tonight at all?" he asked.

"No, not frightened; but why?"

"It looks as though we couldn't go much farther. We may have to stop. You can see how slowly we're moving now. If they can get to the next station we can all top at an hotel, but if not we may have to sit up all night."

"I think it'll be rather fun—only won't Angela Peyton-Russell be worried?"

"She'll probably have telephoned the station at North Adams and will know that we're late. Gloria was wise. The track may be clear by the time her train leaves and she'll arrive as soon as we."

"Then I won't have to decide about warning Professor Pendragon. He'll learn the news less gently."

"He may have left," said Terry.

"I don't know whether to wish that he has or has not," said Ruth. She could not bear the thought

of Gloria's marrying Prince Aglipogue, but every hour it seemed to grow more difficult to entertain the thought of her marrying Terry. Of course it wasn't absolutely necessary for her to marry any one, but she must be in a marrying mood, or she wouldn't think of Aglipogue, and she'd done it so often before that it ought to be easier every time. If only she could ask Terry what he thought, but of course she couldn't do that.

Prince Aglipogue had heard Terry's first words and had lumbered off to secure the first-hand information. All the other men in the coach seemed to be doing the same thing. The snow had brought on a premature darkness and the lights were lit so that now they could see nothing outside. One could almost feel the struggles of the engine, which seemed to grow greater and greater as the speed of the train grew less. Finally it stopped altogether with a sound of grinding wheels. The conductor told them not to be alarmed. It was nothing but a few hours' delay. A steam plough was already on its way. It was impossible to say how long.

For a few minutes the passengers all talked to each other. Some of the men thought that if they could reach the road they might hail a passing sleigh that might convey some of them to the nearest town, but the road was half a mile away and there would be few vehicles abroad in such a storm, and the idea was abandoned. Terry went back to see how George was faring, and reported him still in the

baggage car, sleeping on the trunk which doubtless contained "the daughter of Shiva."

People settled down to waiting; some of them read, and others slept, among them Prince Aglipogue. He snored unrebuked. Ruth heard a man inviting Terry to a poker game in the smoking car and was relieved when he refused. It would have been lonely without him. She tried to read, but the car was growing steadily colder. Terry insisted that she put on her cloak, but even that didn't help much, when she was stiff with inaction. She tried to read, and finally curled up in the chair to sleep. Her last conscious thought was a protest when she felt rather than saw Terry wrapping his cloak around her.

CHAPTER XIII

RUTH awakened to the sound of grinding brakes and opened her eyes to look into the eyes of Terry, which seemed very near as he bent over her. His muscles were horribly cramped. She did not fully remember until he spoke.

"We'll be on our way in less than an hour, and if you want some coffee you'd better hurry. The train was only prepared for one meal, but there is some coffee and perhaps a piece of toast, if we get there before the hungry mob has finished it," he said.

"You gave me your coat," she said, looking down at the garment that was wrapped about her. "You shouldn't have done that; I had my own, and you must have frozen."

"Not at all; I've slept beautifully. Did it keep you warm?"

"Yes, but—"

"That's all that counts; come on and get some coffee."

"Can't I even wait to wash my face, or shall I wash it afterward, cat fashion?"

"If it's really necessary, you may; but you look remarkably clean and fresh considering—a few grains of dust, perhaps—"

He looked at her with his head on one side, smiling.

She was on her feet in an instant, but discovering that one foot was asleep, did not make such swift progress as she had expected. There were two other women in the dressing-room. Yesterday they would have looked at her as silently and impersonally as at the mirror or the wash basin or the black "prop" comb that is always found in Pullman dressing-rooms and that no one has ever been known to use, but now they were talking to her and to each other. The stout lady who was going home from a day's Christmas shopping in New York was most voluble. She was worried about her husband and children, especially her husband.

"What I'll ever say to Henry, I don't know. He told me that I could do just as well in Pittsfield as in New York. They have everything there, and such accommodating sales people—not like New York, where every one is too busy to be polite—and I didn't get a thing I went after—and then this horrible experience. It's added ten years to my life—I know it has."

"After all, it was only a delay," comforted Ruth. "Suppose the train had been wrecked. I think it was rather fun."

"Fun! Fun!" the tall thin woman fairly shrieked at her, and the eyebrow pencil she was using slipped and made a long mark down her nose that she had to rub off subsequently with cold cream,

producing a fine, high polish, which in turn had to be removed with powder, so thickly applied that Ruth thought she looked as if her nose was made of plaster of Paris and had been fastened on after the rest of her face was finished. It was difficult to do anything in the tiny crowded space, but she finally completed a hasty toilet and hurried out to rejoin Terry, who, in her absence, had secured two cups of coffee and some toast and brought them to their seats in the Pullman.

"Where's the Prince?" she asked suddenly, remembering his unwelcome existence.

"In the dining-car; he got there early and managed to secure what little food there was aboard."

"Gloria's train is right behind us," he continued, "so we'll wait for her at the station and all go up together."

The increasing warmth in the train was beginning to clear the frosted windows, and Ruth could see that the snow had stopped falling. A wonderful pink glow was resting on top of the softly rounded mountains, and where the clouds were herded between two high crests it looked like a rose-coloured lake with fir trees on its banks. She forgot her uncomfortable night and felt new-born like the sun. Everything was simple and easy. Everything would be solved; Gloria would not marry Prince Aglipogue. She certainly would not, for he came in now, unshaved, with bloodshot eyes and rumpled

linen. He did not speak at all, but slumped in his hair, his chins resting on his bulging shirt bosom.

"Have you seen George?" she asked Terry.

"Yes; he's all right. I only hope the daughter of Shiva froze to death, but I fear not."

"Will it be long now?"

"We'll be into North Adams in less than an hour."

"I'm afraid you didn't get any sleep at all," said Ruth, observing that his eyes looked tired.

"Do I look as badly as that?" he parried. "Never mind, wait until we reach Fir Tree Farm and I've had a mug of hot Scotch."

"What's hot Scotch?"

"It's something that no one would think of drinking at any time except the Christmas holiday—and the only thing that it seems quite correct to drink on a Christmas holiday, especially in a country house. It's hot, and sweet and full of Captain Kidd's own brand of rum, and spice, and—oh, ever so many things. You'll see."

"Perhaps Gloria won't let me drink it," said Ruth.

"Don't ask her—from now on you must ask me—and if I say you may, it's all right."

"Why?"

"Haven't I tucked you in and watched over you like a mother?" said Terry. "That gives me the right to say yes and no about things. I shall explain

my new position just as soon as the stately Gloria steps off the train."

"This is North Adams; I heard a man say so—"

"Yes; we're here. I wonder if there's food in the station. I'm starving already."

There was not food at the station, but there was a huge sleigh drawn by two powerful horses, with bells on their harness that tinkled merrily in the sharp air, and a man from Fir Tree Farm. Inquiry revealed the fact that Gloria's train would be in within fifteen minutes and Terry told the man to wait. Meantime George appeared, looking as calm and imperturbable as if he had just stepped out of the house on Gramercy Square. They all sat on hard benches in the railway station, or looking through the soiled windows at other passengers driving gaily off to their homes—and breakfast, as Terry said quite wistfully. Prince Aglipogue paced up and down in melancholy silence. Ruth could imagine that he was preparing dignified reproaches to hurl at the auburn head of Gloria. Her train came in finally and she stepped off swathed in furs, exhaling the perfume of violets, followed by respectful porters and greeted by George, who took possession of everything, before the vicarious servitors quite knew what was happening.

Gloria looked so fresh and beautiful, so perfectly groomed and so rested, that they all felt shabbier than ever and more dishevelled. They made a rush

for her, and when George had stepped aside she greeted them with bright smiles.

"Hello, people. You see I was right! What a wonderful morning! Hello, Aggie—you look as if you'd been in a wreck, and Ruth and Terry as if they'd been, oh, on an adventure. I actually believe you liked it. What did you sleep on?"

"It has been a terrible experience," Prince Aglipogue began, trying to look reproachful, but only succeeding in looking ridiculous. He could get no further in his speech, for Ruth and Terry were both talking.

"We did enjoy it; wish you'd been along."

"We slept in our chairs, at least I did, but I don't believe Terry slept at all. You look gorgeous, Gloria—there's a sleigh out there with bells on."

"Come on, then; I'm famished. Didn't you get up in time for breakfast even if there'd been any to get? Have you eaten?"

"No; only a cup of coffee—very bad, too."

They followed George, all talking at once, and piled into the sleigh. There was straw on the bottom and many fur robes, the heaviest of which Aglipogue managed to collect for himself and Gloria, who were in the back of the sleigh. Ruth would have loved to sit in front with the driver, but, of course, George had to sit there.

"My word, why did you wear that?" Gloria burst into peals of laughter, and lifted the silk hat from the head of Prince Aglipogue.

"Naturally I supposed that the millionaires, your friends, would send a conveyance suitable—an enclosed car. How was I to know—straw, farm horses?" He almost snorted in his disgust.

"You're so funny, Aggie! Don't you know there isn't a motor built that could drive through these mountains in winter time? We're lucky that the sleigh can make it."

Ruth noted with horror that in her laughter there was a tender note as if she were talking to an attractive, big boy. Instinctively she turned to look at George's straight back, and long, narrow head. It seemed to her that his ears were visibly listening.

From somewhere Terry produced a long, knitted scarf, and this Gloria tied around the Prince's head, laying his hat tenderly down in the middle of the sleigh. He looked like a huge, ugly boy with mumps, Ruth thought, and Gloria, whose sense of humour even her Titania-like love could not quite quench, burst into renewed peals of laughter. Perhaps he'll get angry and break his engagement, Ruth thought, hopefully, but his resentment seemed to be at things in general rather than at Gloria.

They were really very comfortable in spite of the keen wind and the country round them was magnificent, hill melting into hill in endless procession like the waves on a limitless ocean. The sky was a vivid blue and the rich green of the fir and hemlock trees shone warm in contrast to the white snow. The clear ringing of the bells on the horses

seemed like fairy music leading them over the hills and far away to some tremendous adventure. Just what that adventure would be Ruth could not guess, but she knew that Gloria would be its heroine and George the villain. As for Prince Aglipogue, with his fat face swathed in the scarf, she would concede him no other rôle than that of buffoon. The hero? Perhaps Professor Pendragon, perhaps Terry, but she would rather save Terry for another story.

If only she knew whether Professor Pendragon was still at Fir Tree Lodge. It would have been easy to ask the driver, who was an inquisitive New Englander and was making desperate attempts to talk with George, but, of course, she dared not do that because of Gloria. After all she was not supposed to know anything about the guests. That was Angela Peyton-Russell's affair.

The heavy snow rather helped than impeded their progress, but they were all rather cold and tremendously hungry before they reached the gates of Fir Tree Farm. Then there was a slow pull up to the top of the hill on which it was built, a huge stone house, almost hidden in a forest of fir trees.

Prince Aglipogue shuddered when he looked at it.

"How is it heated?" he asked in tragic tones.

"Very old-fashioned—no furnace or steam heat—just fire places like your dear castles in Europe," said Gloria, which was not true, but served its purpose of making him look even more melancholy and making Gloria laugh again. She was quite the gay-

est person in the party and didn't even complain of hunger.

Angela Peyton-Russell was not at the door to greet them, but a maid-servant and a man servant were. Angela had read some place that it was not smart to greet one's guests in country homes that way, so she did what she thought was the correct thing.

"Though she's probably watching us from some point of vantage," Gloria whispered to Ruth, as they followed the maid up a wide staircase, at the top of which she separated them, leading Ruth into what looked like the most cheerful room in the world.

"Your luggage will be up directly," she told Ruth, "and as soon as you can you're to come down to breakfast. Mrs. Peyton-Russell has waited it for you."

She left at once, evidently going to attendance on Gloria, who any servant could see at a glance was the more important guest of the two. While she was waiting for her bags Ruth warmed herself before a wonderful wood fire, in front of which a blue satin-covered day bed tempted her to further rest. Through the wide windows the tops of the mountains that had looked so cold when she was driving to the house resumed the almost warm beauty that she had admired on the train. Snow always looks thus, infinitely attractive when one is safely indoors before a fire, but rather cold and lonely when one is travelling through it. She had hardly had time to remove

her cloak and hat when a tap at the door announced her bags, and another maid came in to help her unpack. Ruth let her stay because she took rather kindly to being served, an inheritance from her mother, who came from Virginia, and because she might, without appearing too curious, learn something of the other guests.

"Are there many people here?" she asked. It sounded rather unsubtle after she had said it, but the maid was evidently a country girl, not like the one who had brought her up, who had probably come from the Peyton-Russell town house, and she did not seem surprised, but rather glad to talk.

"Only Mr. and Mrs. Peyton-Russell, and Miss Mayfield—but you came with her—you're Miss Ruth Mayfield? and the foreign prince, and Mr. Riordan and Professor Pendragon, a poor sick man who's been here almost a month, and a Miss Gilchrist, a singer. Perhaps you know her?"

"No, I don't think so," said Ruth, almost sorry she had spoken, for the maid seemed to consider it an invitation to talk at length.

"You'll be surprised when you meet her, Miss; she's that odd—not at all like you other ladies. She sings beautiful—do you want to change for breakfast? I wouldn't if I were you. The breakfast's waiting—here, let me smooth your hair—no, I want it for practice—one day I want to be a lady's maid—a personal maid."

She laid great stress on the first syllable of the word personal.

"They say some of these personal maids in big houses gets lovely tips—not that I want tips; I'm glad to serve some people, but a working girl's got to take care of herself. If they was all like Miss Gilchrist life *would* be hard."

She had a curious way of talking, with a rising and falling inflection, stressing unexpected words and syllables, so that in listening to her voice Ruth scarcely heard her words and forgot that she ought not to encourage servant's gossip.

"She's terrible homely for one thing, and I think looking at herself in the mirror has soured her disposition. She wears her hair short, and at first I thought it was toifide fever. You should seen her glare at me when I ast. You better run right down; I'll finish unpacking for you. You look too sweet; clothes ain't everything." With which doubtful compliment ringing in her ears, Ruth passed out, but instead of "running right down" she knocked at Gloria's door. She had the feeling that if they were to walk down and meet Professor Pendragon face to face she wanted to be with Gloria. She had a vague fear that Gloria might faint, and she wanted to be there to bear her up. Gloria was herself all ready for descent, but she had changed her travelling costume for a charming frock. Hunger had doubtless prompted speed and a theatrical woman's facility had aided her. She looked stunning, Ruth thought,

and her heart swelled with pride at the thought that at least her Gloria was looking her very best for the encounter.

"Afraid to go down alone?" Gloria asked. "You needn't be; you're looking ducky. I hope she has a millionaire for you to meet, but no such luck. That would spoil 'our Bohemian circle.'". She mimicked Angela's gurgling voice perfectly. "I dare say those hungry brutes of men are waiting now—if they have the grace to wait, which I doubt; I could eat almost anything myself."

Angela, having done her conventional duty by not meeting them at the door, now yielded to her emotions and ran halfway up the stairs to meet them, hurling herself into Gloria's arms and even kissing Ruth on the cheek to make her feel that she was welcome and really belonged.

"Come on, we're having breakfast in the sun parlour; it's the loveliest room in the house. Every one is waiting. I've only two other guests, and I didn't tell them who was coming. You'll be such a welcome surprise," she gurgled.

"We will, indeed," thought Ruth.

"This is the library," she waved her hand at an enormous room with gloomy furniture, the door of which was open. "Cosy little place, don't you think? But here—"

She paused dramatically before she threw open the door of the sun parlour. She was after all such a fluffy, good-hearted child that her pride in her pos-

sessions was no more offensive than the pride of a child in new toys, and Ruth couldn't blame her for being proud of the room they entered. They all stood at the open door looking at it a moment before entering—a long, narrow room, evidently running the full length of the house from north to south, with two sides of glass, window after window with drawn-back draperies of amber silk, and between each window a bird cage, hung above a tall blue vase filled with cut flowers. At one end of the room the breakfast table was spread and at the other, where there were no windows, was a fireplace, round which the men were standing—Terry, Prince Aglipogue and John Peyton-Russell. There was a lady seated there, too, and in another big, wing chair Ruth thought she could discern the top of Professor Pendragon's head.

They had satisfied Angela with their admiration, and as they came in the three standing men advanced to meet them, and the woman turned her head. Ruth looked at her, and her brain working by a sort of double process, she had time to compare her with the maid's description, even while her heart was standing still because of the imminent meeting of Gloria and Professor Pendragon. Miss Gilchrist did have short hair, not a fluffy mass like Dorothy Winslow's, but lank, dank, soiled-brown locks that framed a lank, soiled-brown countenance. Her gown also seemed to be of a dusty black, and Ruth could easily imagine that if her manners were

no more attractive than her appearance, she would be quite as disagreeable as the maid described her. A closer view showed an out-thrust foot in a long, flat, soiled-brown shoe, and Ruth remembered what Dorothy had once told her:

"Never trust a woman who wears common sense shoes—there is something radically wrong with her."

She was being introduced to Mr. Peyton-Russell now. She had never met him before. He was a large man who looked as if he took his material wealth very seriously indeed and thought he owed some reparation to the public from which he had extracted it, but he had a heavy cordiality that was rather charming because it was so obviously sincere.

"And now you must meet the others," chirped Angela.

Ruth realized for the first time that Angela was like a yellow canary. The birds, singing gaily in the sunshine, made the comparison almost compulsory.

"You'll have to come to them, and anyway, I always have cocktails in front of the fireplace. After that lone, cold ride, you must need one, though it is only ten o'clock in the morning."

They followed her across the long room, Ruth walking a step behind Gloria, watching her face, waiting for the moment when she should see around the high-backed chair. They must have seen him at the same moment, for Ruth's heart gave a little thump and seemed that Gloria missed a step, her body swaying just perceptibly for a second, while

one hand flew to her throat in a gesture that Ruth had seen before. Her colour did not change, but with the sophistication of four months in New York Ruth knew that Gloria's colour did not "come and go" for very good reason. The biggest change was in her eyes. They seemed to have turned a dark violet and to have opened wider than Ruth had ever seen them before, in a fixed stare. They were standing before him now. In her anxiety about Gloria she had not thought of him at all. His face was quite white and he seemed to be nerving himself for some tremendous ordeal.

"Pardon me for not rising,"—he indicated the crutches beside his chair.

"Professor Pendragon's not a bit like a real invalid—one forgets it the moment one talks to him," apologized Angela, rather tactlessly. "He and John are such good friends that I used to be jealous of him, and when I heard he was ill I insisted that John make him come, and do you know, he wanted to run away before, but I told him what clever people were coming and made him stay—aren't you glad now that you've met Gloria Mayfield, and Ruth?"

"Miss Ruth Mayfield and I have met before," he said.

She was almost afraid to look at him. There was in his eyes a look of questioning, almost of reproach. He had grown thinner and she wondered how Gloria could be so heartless. Still it wasn't all Gloria's fault. Ruth had seen her dark eyes melt with pity at

sight of the crutches—pity and a sort of bewildered fright, but when he spoke as if he had never seen her before, the soft look faded and her eyes changed from violet to the coldest grey imaginable, and her mouth set in a cold line, quite unlike its natural form.

"I'm sure you'll like our little Bohemian circle," she said.

Ruth wondered how she dared make fun of Angela that way in her own house. Somehow or other they had all been presented to Miss Gilchrist, too, but she proved to be one of those persons one habitually forgets, and who is perpetually trying to call back the wandering attention of others, like a friendless pup rubbing his nose in the hands of strangers, hoping some place to find a master. Of course Miss Gilchrist hadn't that kind of nose, but there was a pitiful look in her dust-coloured brown eyes that simply plead for attention. Evidently Terry saw it, for he was talking to her now, or perhaps he was only trying to relieve what was an awkward moment for him as well as for Ruth.

The cocktails came and though Ruth had never seen Gloria drink anything stronger than coffee before four o'clock in the afternoon, she took this one in the way that Ruth had sometimes seen men drink, almost pouring it down. They all moved off to the breakfast table then, Gloria with John Peyton-Russell, Angela beside Prince Aglipogue, and Terry with Miss Gilchrist. Ruth waited while Professor

Pendragon picked up his crutches. Evidently he could get about very well by himself.

"I want to see you after breakfast—as soon as possible," she whispered to him.

"The enclosed veranda at five o'clock," he whispered back.

She wanted to ask him what and where the enclosed veranda was, but there was no chance. Every one was talking at once, it seemed; that is, every one except Professor Pendragon and herself. She tried to catch Terry's eyes, but when she did, he only lifted one eyebrow as who should say:

"You see, your anxiety was needless; they are sophisticated New Yorkers and didn't mind a bit."

But they did mind; she knew that. If they had recognized each other—that would have been the sophisticated thing to do. Instead they had taken the romantic course and met as strangers, though unlike strangers they did not talk to each other. All around her she could hear snatches of conversation. Terry seemed to have quite won the formidable Miss Gilchrist.

"Yes; I sing," she could hear her saying; "but I prefer poetry to any of the arts."

"Really?" said Terry politely.

"Yes; I say that poetry is my chief métier. I have a poem this month in *Zaneslie's*."

"I must read it," murmured Terry.

"You should hear me recite to really appreciate;

don't you think that one is always the best interpreter of one's own work?"

Terry nodded understandingly, and then in a voice that amused Ruth even while she thought it rather cruel of him to laugh at the serious Miss Gilchrist:

"Do you write rhymed poetry or do you prefer free verse?" he asked.

Miss Gilchrist deserted her grape fruit and gave him her undivided attention.

"You know, Mr. Riordan, for years I have written rhymed poetry, but recently, quite recently, I have felt a definite urge toward the free medium. I have not relinquished the rhyme, but I am expressing myself in both forms. The free medium—"

Her voice went on, and on, but Ruth could not hear her now because Glenda's voice, clear and high like the sleigh bells, rose above everything else for the moment.

"No; I can't work in Terry's play; I've decided never to go back to the stage. I want to travel—South America, perhaps."

"But you're going there on a concert tour, aren't you, Prince?" said Angela. "Perhaps—if you have a secret from me, Gloria, I don't know what I shall do to you."

For a moment Ruth's eyes met those of Professor Pendragon. She saw a strange light flash into them, like a sword half withdrawn from its sheath and then replaced, as he dropped his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was easy to slip away alone. Ruth knew that Gloria, who had gone to her own room, expected to be followed, but she did not want to talk alone with Gloria until she had seen Professor Pendragon. She found the enclosed veranda, a sleeping porch above the sun room. She threw a heavy cloak about her shoulders and passed unobserved down the hall and through the narrow doorway leading outside. He was there, waiting for her in his wheel chair. There was another chair beside him, perhaps for the nurse. She could look out over a wide circle of white hills with masses of dark green where fir trees clustered in the hollows. The outer edge of the circle was stained a deep rose, so that hill and cloud lay heaped against the sunset bathed in cold flame.

She moved toward him slowly, wondering how she would begin now that she had kept her rendezvous. He laid down the pipe he had been smoking and held out a hand to her, a hand through which the light seemed to shine, it was so pale and thin.

She sat down beside him without speaking at once and looked for a moment at the sunset hills. They seemed so quiet and cold and peaceful. What she was going to say would sound strange and unreal

here—more strange even than it sounded in New York.

"I want to talk to you about Gloria," she began, but he did not speak when she paused, so she went on:

"When you sent me that card to the water colour show—it was at breakfast I got it—Gloria told me that she'd been married to you. She's my aunt—my father's sister, but I'd never seen her until after father and mother both died and I came here to study art. Mother sent me to her because she is my only living relative. She didn't know you were in New York until I got that card, and she asked me not to tell you about her, so I lied when you asked me about myself, or at least didn't tell the truth. Then just before we came here I saw Neis Zord and he told me you were here too. At first I thought of telling Gloria, but I didn't because I want you to help me. I want you to save Gloria."

"I'm afraid I can't save Gloria, my child, any more than Gloria can save me—she perhaps has lost her soul—tomorrow I lose my life. It is all set and we have as little to do with it as with that thin thread of waning moon up there, which tomorrow night will be utterly dark."

"But don't you see, Gloria doesn't understand and that's why she is helpless; but you do understand and can prevent things. You said yourself to me once, 'The stars incline but do not compel.' If you won't help me I must do everything alone, but

you must tell me the truth. Isn't George the cause of your illness?"

He leaned suddenly toward her.

"Why do you think that?"

"You talked about the evil eye and the dark of the moon; the others, Nels and Dorothy thought you were joking or talking in riddles, but I didn't. The night of the show, when you were first stricken, I saw George performing incantations before a horrible snake—a black cobra, I think; a month later he worshipped the snake again and your illness increased. He has come here because Angela wants him to entertain us with his music and magic. I am afraid that he will use the snake. You say you are to lose your life tomorrow; if George is the cause of your illness, then that is true."

He was still leaning toward her, searching her face in the waning light. He spoke slowly as if his words were but a surface ripple over a deep lake of thought.

"It is true that my illness is mind-born—I have known that from the beginning—and that it is not of myself, and I have tried to discover who could have thought it on me. It may be, as you suggest, that George has done it. It is an answer, but why?"

"Because of Gloria," she said. With another man it would have been difficult to tell her beliefs, but for the moment it seemed as if they two were hanging suspended in the dusk-blue bowl of mountain and sky, and the soul, eager yet indifferent of

life, that looked out of his eyes, commanded absolute truth.

"George loves her—he is a Hindoo, and for no other reason would he have been her servant all these years. At first he understood the prejudices of a Western woman and realized that he couldn't marry her, but I think if you will look back perhaps now you can see how he separated you and Gloria. I have never seen the two men who followed, but I think he must have hypnotized her into marrying them, and then himself broken the marriages, and now she is going to marry this horrible Prince Aglipogue. George is forcing her to do that. He boasted that it was so to me. It will ruin her career and make her poor, and break her heart with shame when she wakes to what she has done. Then George will claim his reward. He did not mention your name when he talked to me, but he said, 'There is only one other fit to walk beside her, and he is slowly dying of an unknown disease.' You see there is only one link gone from my story and that is how you let Gloria go at first. Why did you, why did you?"

In the retelling of the story that had occupied her mind all these weeks, putting all her fears into words, it seemed that the danger she told had grown four-fold. When she had tried to tell Terry his very attitude of comprehension had made her story sound unreal, but when she told it now, she saw belief and understanding in Pendragon's eyes, and

something else—a resignation that maddened her. It was as if he watched Gloria being murdered and made no movement to protect her.

"Why, why?" she demanded again, grasping his arm with tense fingers. She could almost have shaken him.

He seemed quite unmoved by her excitement.

"Gloria had met George before we were married," he said in his quiet voice. "She found him ill, you know, and paid his debts and got him a doctor, and when he was well he wanted to serve her. I didn't like him and advised her not to take him; it would have been much better for him to go back to his profession, but he begged to come and she liked him; perhaps his devotion flattered her. Everything went well until the night when Gloria was to open in a new play. I never went much to the theatre. I thought it better to leave her alone in her professional life, and on this night the planet Eros—a small planet discovered quite recently in our new solar system—was to be very near—much nearer than it had ever been but once before, much nearer than it would be again for many years. The first time the astronomers of the world had missed a wonderful opportunity; this time they were all watching. We were to take photographs if the weather permitted; by means of Eros and comparative calculations we would discover something exact about the distance and weight of many other planets. It was the opportunity of a century.

"We had a small flat in London and George was acting as a sort of butler and sometimes valeting me as well. I hated having him around, but Gloria said he was happier when he was busy. I remember now everything that happened and how he looked at me. 'You are going to the theatre tonight, Sir?' he said, and I had the impression that he often gave me, that he was being impertinent, almost insulting, though there was neither impertinence nor insult in his words or manner.

"'No; I'm due at the observatory,' I answered. There had been no idea of my going to the opening in my mind, or in Gloria's, I think, until that moment, but when George had left us she turned on me with reproaches. She said that I took no interest in her work; that I was jealous of her career and that I must choose between her and the stars that night. I dare say I was very stupid, but she seemed quite strange and unreasonable as I had never seen her before, and I said some rather nasty things. She said if I did not go to the theatre she would never return to the flat. Of course I said that was unnecessary—that I would go. I did; expecting a message from her every day. The only message I got was from her lawyers in Paris, where she had gone for a divorce. That's the story."

He stopped talking now, but Ruth waited. Over the hills the rose flush had faded, the thin, keen blade of the almost disappearing moon hung like a scimitar in a field of dark purple and resting above

it a star hung, trembling, as if waiting for the cold arms of a laggard lover.

"I suppose half confidences won't do," he said at last. "I still love Gloria; what man once having loved her could forget? 'Time cannot change nor custom stale her infinite variety'; but of what use to fight one's destiny—in another incarnation, perhaps. I cannot believe all that you say of George. That he is a Mahatma is doubtless true, that he loves Gloria is gruesomely natural, that he hates me and has put upon me this mind-born malady is reasonable, but that he should possess, or even aspire to possess, Gloria is incredible."

There was a sadness on his face, another worldness in his eyes, but there was no light of battle there, and Ruth, whose youth and energy cried out for action, felt as if she were beating with futile hands against a stone wall.

"But he does want her, and he's going to succeed if you don't do something. If he has the power to kill you, he has the power to do these other things too. Even if you don't believe this, you must do something to save your own life."

"I'm afraid I'm not very keen about living; if I die now it is an easy way out—"

She wanted to protest that if he had courage he might yet win Gloria again, but she did not dare raise hopes that might never be fulfilled. Even if Gloria were saved from the Prince who could tell that she might not marry Terry?

"That's weak, and cowardly," she said, "and if you believe in the wisdom of the East yo' know that in the next life you will not enjoy the fruit of any joy for which you have not struggled in this. You are selfish, too. Even if you no longer care for your own life, you must do what you can to help Gloria."

"She no longer wants anything from me; she would only resent my interference."

"You are thinking only of yourself—what difference can her attitude make now? Promise me that you will do something—promise—"

"Perhaps the voice of youth is the voice to follow—I am afraid I have grown old and age does not love knighthood, but I promise that if I see any way in which to change her destiny and mine, I will make what effort I can. I will think about it."

It was almost dark now, and Gloria was standing beside them before they saw her.

"Angela's been looking for you; she wants you to play billiards, Ruth."

"But I don't know how."

"That doesn't make any difference; neither do I and neither does Miss Gilchrist; you just stand around and make the men wish that you'd go away and let them have a good game—but don't go just yet," as Ruth started away. "I want to say something to Professor Pendragon and I don't want to be alone with him."

Ruth could not see his face very clearly, but she

saw his long white hands clenching over the arms of his chair.

"I thought, of course, when we met this morning, that you would find some excuse for going away on the next train, Percy."

"Why should I do that, Gloria? I did not know you were coming; you did not know I was here. We have been thrown together for a brief time. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Peyton-Russell knows that we have met before. I have promised to stay over the New Year. John knows I haven't any particular business interest to call me away. I thought the least conspicuous thing would be to stay. My illness makes it easy for me to stay much in my own rooms. We need not meet often, but if you wish, of course, I can go tomorrow."

There was no trace of bitterness or anger in his voice. He spoke in a cold, casual way as if he were discussing some rather boring detail of business.

"I do wish it very much—Prince Aglipogue has asked Angela to announce our engagement tomorrow night. Of course no one but Ruth and Mr. Riordan knows that we have ever met before, but it will be awkward for me, even though you seem to have forgotten everything."

Her voice, as cold as his at the beginning, deepened and trembled on the last words, whether with tears or anger Ruth could not tell. She only knew that both of these people were suffering as only proud people can suffer and she did not want to

watch. She tried to slip away, but Gloria's hand on her arm restrained her.

"Really, Gloria, I don't see why you should announce a thing like that; you might as well make an announcement every time you buy a new frock."

The words could not have cut Gloria more than they did Ruth. Surely this was not the man who not fifteen minutes earlier had told her that he still loved Gloria? If he had hated her he could have said nothing more rude. She felt Gloria's hand tighten on her arm as if for support.

"I will go, then; you need not trouble," she said in a low voice.

"No; forgive me—I will go on the early train."

But already Gloria had turned and was walking away, and Ruth, not knowing what to say, followed, her heart aching for both the woman and the lonely man outside. Gloria did not pause nor look back and Ruth suspected that she dared not turn her face for fear of disclosing tears.

The warm air inside made Ruth realize for the first time that, though sheltered, it was very cold outside. She hesitated, wondering whether to follow Gloria or to go back and beg Professor Pendragon not to remain longer out of doors. Gloria decided her by walking steadily forward and turning into her own room, closing the door behind her.

He was still sitting where they had left him, staring out into the blue-black sky. Even his hands still

clung tightly to the arms of his chair as they had when she had left him.

"I've just discovered that it's terrifically cold out here and you ought to come in," she said, trying to speak as if nothing had happened.

"The nurse was to have come out a long time ago; I dare say she saw us talk and went back. If you think you could push this chair for me—I haven't any crutches here—I will go in," he answered in the same tone.

Without speaking she moved to the back of the chair and began wheeling him toward the door. It really moved very easily. She stopped at the door, opened it and pushed him through.

"Which door?" she asked.

"That one," he pointed.

It was next to Gloria's room and across the hall from her own. The obvious thought came to her of how these two, apparently so near, were separated by a bridgeless ocean of misunderstanding.

CHAPTER XV

“**I**T’S a worse storm than the one that held up your train; it’s rather Christmasy and all that, but it’s rather unfortunate, because the nurse has become alarmed about Professor Pendragon and he wanted to take the early train back to New York. We’ve telephoned Dr. Gerstens, and if it’s possible for anything to travel five miles through this snow storm he’ll be here.”

Ruth glanced across the breakfast table at Gloria while Angela was speaking, but there was no annoyance on Gloria’s face, only a desperate fear looked out of her eyes. Again it seemed to Ruth that she was a trapped bird.

“How about the children?” asked Mr. Peyton-Russell.

“Oh, these storms never last more than a few hours; by noon it will be over and most of them can get here—those that only live a few miles away. They’re accustomed to weather like this—unless James refuses to take out the horses—James, you know, thinks more of the horses than he does of us,” she continued, turning to the others. “You know every Christmas John has the most beautiful custom. He goes around to all the farm houses and collects the children and brings them here to

play games and enjoy our Christmas tree. I expect you to help entertain them, Ruth. You're the youngest person here."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about children, but I'll try."

"I'll help," said Terry quickly.

"I knew you would," said Angela, and they all laughed, though Ruth could see nothing to laugh at. She was beginning to fear that the events of the last weeks had dulled her wits.

"Can't Pendragon take the afternoon train if it clears up?" asked Mr. Peyton-Russell.

"The nurse won't let him; says he can't stand sleeping cars. She simply won't let him go until morning—and perhaps when Dr. Gerstens comes he'll say it isn't necessary—though he has looked rather badly the last few days. You know at first I quite forgot that he was ill until he would try to walk. I like him so much—don't you think it's awfully sweet of me to like John's friends, Gloria?"

Angela was in one of her juvenile moods in which Gloria usually encouraged her, but now she only answered:

"Yes, very."

"It is the duty of a good wife to like the friends of her husband," said Prince Aglipogue, who by this time had sufficiently satisfied the first keen edge of the appetite acquired through the night to begin taking part in the conversation.

This remark was a challenge to Miss Gilchrist,

who began a long talk on the duty of every woman to retain her individuality after marriage, illustrating her talk with examples of what the unfortunate man who married her might expect. And no one was rude enough or brave enough to tell her that all these plans and warnings on her part were unnecessary. Ruth didn't even listen. She had discovered that Miss Gilchrist never required an answer to anything she said. She was content if only allowed to go on talking.

It was at such times as these that everything that Ruth had seen in the past and everything she feared for the future seemed most unreal and incredible.

Surely here in this warm room with its glowing fire, its flowers and birds, among these every-day people, eating breakfast and chatting of ordinary things, there could be nothing more sinister than the snow storm outside; and that only seemed to add to the comfort and good cheer within.

Then she saw George glide across the far end of the long room, silent, dark-clad, swift, and she remembered that this was not only Christmas Eve; it was also the dark of the moon. The children would come to play before the Christmas tree in the afternoon—and at night the doom of the daughter of Shiva would fall. Later she knew that it was in this moment that she thought again of the words of Professor Pendragon: "If I had an enemy I would destroy his faith in his power to harm," and she knew what it was that she must do.

Angela was right. The snow stopped falling before ten o'clock. They had all been keeping country hours and had breakfasted at eight, and they all watched James drive off in the huge sleigh that was to bring the children to the Christmas party.

There would not be as many as usual, for James had been forced to make a late start and he could not travel very rapidly in the deep snow and the children must be there at three o'clock if they were to start home early in the evening. For these very good reasons he could not stop at more than four or five of the very nearest farms. However, as each farm could provide from two to six children, there promised to be quite enough to keep Ruth busy if she was to amuse them.

The idea of amusing children rather frightened Ruth, but she was relieved when Angela took them to see the tree. It had all been very nicely arranged with enough mechanical amusement to relieve her of any very great responsibility. The tree—a very big one—was in a large room from which most of the furniture, except a few chairs, had been thoughtfully removed. Aside from the candles and tinsel ornaments there were dozens of small gifts, of little value, but suitable almost for any child, together with the usual "Christian sweets," as Terry called them, which Ruth remembered to have received herself from Church Christmas trees, and to have seen nowhere else at any time. Then there was to be tea with lots of cakes and chocolate and nuts and fruit,

and altogether Ruth could see that there would not be more than one torturing hour in which she would have to "amuse the children." Besides they would probably amuse themselves.

"Why not teach them poetry games?" suggested Miss Gilchrist, "those lovely things of Vachel Lindsay's, where the poetry is interpreted by motion—"

"Better let them play games they know," said Angela. "They only have an hour or two, and there won't be time to teach them anything new."

"Oh, very well. I was only suggesting; of course if you prefer the old-fashioned, undirected play—but it seemed to me a splendid opportunity to bring beauty into the lives of children who might never have another opportunity of studying it. I have gone in for child study, you know, quite deeply; I may say that child culture is my—"

Ruth feared that she was going to say it was her chief metier, but Angela interrupted with:

"I think I'll have some little tables brought in for the tea. Children are so awkward about cups and things, and perhaps they'll feel less shy if they're all sitting together round a table."

Though her ideas about modern child culture seemed to meet with so little approval, Miss Gilchrist did not absent herself from the party. She was with Ruth and Terry and Mr. and Mrs. Peyton-Russell while they watched the arrival of the sleigh load of shouting children. Prince Aglipogue was, of course, far too dignified to take any interest

and Gloria had absented herself since breakfast as if she feared that she would have to meet Pendragon again.

"They didn't seem to mind meeting at all," Terry had said to her the day before, but when Angela had spoken of Professor Pendragon's dangerous condition and his plan of returning to the city, Ruth had caught his glance and knew that he understood at least in part—at least as much as any one else could understand. She did not intend to tell him anything about her own conversation with Pendragon or the scene between him and Gloria which she had witnessed. She knew that she had been there, not so much as a confidante, as an artificial barrier between two people who otherwise could not have borne the pain of meeting. The experience had made her feel very old, and now the idea of entertaining children seemed almost preposterous.

The door was opened and the little guests came trooping into the big hall, but something seemed to have happened when they clambered out of the sleigh. They had been laughing after the most approved manner of childhood. Ruth could swear to that. She had seen their faces and some of the shrill shouts had penetrated into the house. Now they stood, with wide, curious eyes and solemn demeanour, the little ones were huddling close behind the older ones and all looking like shy, frightened wood things. They followed Mr. Peyton-Russell into the room of the Christmas tree; they looked,

but where were the cries of delight with which Ruth had expected them to hail this wonder? Beyond shy "yes" and "no" to questions they said nothing. They stood like little, wooden images while the maids separated them from vast quantities of little coats, sweaters, knitted caps, hoods, mufflers, and overshoes. Ruth hoped that they would breathe sighs of relief and begin to look happy after that, but they didn't. They stood quite solemnly where they were and Angela and her husband, who were to return later to distribute the gifts, fled, leaving them to be "amused." The electric candles on the tree had been lighted, though it was a bright day, and some of the bolder children drew near to it, but still they did not talk. It seemed that entrance into the house had made them strangers to each other as well as to their hosts, and they looked so dull Ruth wondered, remembering the hordes of dark-faced children she had seen playing in Washington Square, if country children were duller than city children.

"Let me start them," said Miss Gilchrist, talking quite audibly as if the children could not hear. "I have a great way with children." She threw an ogreish smile at them as she spoke and one little girl instinctively drew near to Terry as if for protection.

"Now, children, what shall we play?" she asked in what was doubtless intended to be an engaging tone of voice.

For a long time no one spoke; then a little girl—the tallest little girl there—whispered just audibly: "Kissing games."

Terry grinned delightedly, but Miss Gilchrist flushed a dark purple.

"No, indeed," she said, still in her school-teacher voice. "I'm sure the other children do not want to play games like that. Tell me what you play at school." But again there was silence. Though some of the little boys had giggled, there were indications that most of the children did want to play "kissing games," probably because those were the only indoor games they knew.

"Why not let them play the games they're accustomed to playing—isn't there one called—er—post-office?" he questioned the little girl. She nodded emphatically, and Miss Gilchrist, casting looks expressive of deep disgust at both Terry and Ruth, departed. In her absence the children seemed to gain confidence. They told Terry their names and recalled to him such details of the fascinating game of post-office as he had forgotten.

"D'you really mean you never played it?" he asked Ruth.

"I'm sorry; I didn't know it was so important."

"No child's education complete without it; but it's never too late to mend your ways, so you can learn now."

At first Ruth couldn't help feeling rather ridiculous, but the children after five minutes of play

seemed to regard her as one of them, and Terry was perhaps a bit younger than the youngest boy there. They progressed from one game to another, and to Ruth it seemed that every game, no matter how harmless on the surface, called for some declaration in rhyme about "the un that I luf best," followed by a kiss to prove it, and she was in constant fear that the etiquette of play would require that she kiss Terry, but it never did. Evidently Terry understood these things far better than she did, for while he kissed every little maid in the room and every little boy made declaration of his love for her, they never had to kiss each other.

Still it was a relief when tea was brought in; a relief to the children as well, if one could judge by the enthusiasm with which they greeted it, and afterward John Peyton-Russell and Angela and Gloria and even Prince Aglipogue came in to see the distribution of gifts.

They all sat in rows, "Like in Sunday School," as Ruth heard one of the little girls whisper, while Mr. Peyton-Russell made a little speech and gave out the gifts. Gloria's cheeks were flushed and her eyes were unnaturally bright, Ruth thought, but as always under stress of emotion, she was hiding behind words, amusing words with a touch of acid behind them.

"He used to invite the parents, too," she told Ruth; "sort of lord of the manor pose; but he found that American farmers do not lend themselves

well to the tenantry idea; they came and then sent him invitations as a return of hospitality. They simply would not be faithful retainers, and then"—

"I'm afraid Aggie's being bored—not enough to drink for one thing—Angela is so conservative—dinner tonight will cheer him—some more people coming; the Brixtons and their guests, I think. Hope Percy has the good grace to keep to his rooms even though he didn't leave."

"He couldn't, you know, because of the storm this morning," defended Ruth.

"I say, is he going to die, do you think?" she asked suddenly.

"No—what made you ask that?" Ruth felt her eyes shifting in spite of her efforts to meet Gloria's clear gaze.

"I don't know—something in the look of him when we left him there in his wheel chair—you know everything is finished for us, but still it would be terrible! I should hate to have Percy die, though God knows I have enough ex-husbands to be able to spare just one."

Her shrill, mirthless laughter rose above the chatter of the children's voices.

"Don't, Gloria—please don't—I can't bear it!"

"Look here, child—are you—do you love Percy?" Her voice had changed now, all the hardness gone from it—it was almost the mother tone. Her words startled Ruth more than anything that had gone before.

"Love Professor Pendragon? Of course not. I like him awfully well—I'm afraid I think you've treated him very badly and perhaps I'm sorry for him, but I never thought of him in any other way. What made you ask that?"

Gloria listened, at first with a little puzzled line between her perfect brows, and then, convinced of Ruth's sincerity, her face cleared.

"I don't know—something Terry said first gave me the idea. I think he got the impression from something you said. And it wouldn't be so strange, would it? *Percy is attractive.*"

"Much more attractive than that horrible creature," said Ruth, glancing in Prince Aglipogue's direction.

Gloria shrugged her shoulders and did not reply. One could say anything to Gloria. She was never offended because people did not agree with her, nor did the opinions of other people change or influence her own actions or beliefs in any way.

Ruth did not try to talk any more. She was thinking of what Gloria had said about Terry. If Terry thought that she was interested in Pendragon—if she could have made a mistake like this—wasn't it possible that she had made a mistake in thinking that Terry loved Gloria? Somehow since their adventure on the train together he had not seemed so inaccessible. Reason had told her that he was unattainable, but something stronger than reason had told another story. There had been an indefinable

something different in his attitude toward her during the last few days—something like a prelude—something for which they were both waiting. Still, she must not deceive herself with false hopes. There were so many things for which she was waiting—things that would happen now she knew within a very few hours.

CHAPTER XVI

THE other guests had come, so that there were twelve people around the Christmas Eve dinner table, among them Professor Pendragon, in whose quiet face Ruth thought she read some new resolve. ‘*rely he must have some purpose in thus joining the others when he knew that tonight Gloria’s engagement to Prince Aglipogue would be announced, and when his illness would have made his absence seem quite plausible.*’ He moved about so unobtrusively as to make his infirmity almost unnoticed, and now, seated beside Ruth, she found it difficult to believe that he was really paralysed. She talked to him of trivial things, ordinary dinner chat, or listened to the others, wondering within herself what secrets lay behind those smiling masks of triviality.

If Gloria and Pendragon, who had once been married, could meet thus as strangers, if she and Terry knowing their secret, or at least a part of it, could calmly pretend to the world that they did not know, might not all these other people have secrets, too—old memories that wine would not drown, meetings and partings whose pleasure or pain even time could not dim—immortal loves and hates still living, but sealed securely in coffins of conventionality?

Hundreds of candles flashed against dark walls, stained to a semblance of old age; bright scarlet holly berries nestled against their green waxen leaves, and dark, red roses shed their heavy perfume over everything. The dinner was being a great success, for there were no awkward lulls in conversation, and, while Ruth in her youth and innocence did not know it, Angela Peyton-Russell was blessed with an excellent cook, without whose services the faces of the men present would not have been so happy. Ruth did not even observe what she ate, but Prince Aglipogue, upon whose face sat heavy satisfaction, could have told to the smallest grain of condiment exactly what each dish contained.

Some one suggested that there were enough people to dance, and Angela, realizing the advantages of spontaneity in entertainment, eagerly acquiesced. They would dance for an hour or two after dinner and she would have her little "show" later; but the guests themselves would have to supply the music.

The Prince, who could be agreeable when he chose, immediately offered his services and his violin if Miss Gilchrist would accompany him with the piano.

It would all be just like an old-fashioned country dance, and "so delightfully Bohemian," Angela thought. She was tremendously happy over the success of her Christmas party, and her husband was tremendously satisfied because of the success of his beautiful wife in the luxury of his beautiful home:

but Ruth's heart ached whenever she heard Gloria's liquid laughter because there were tears in it, and in the steady fire of Professor Pendragon's dark eyes she saw a flame more pitiful than the funeral pyre of a Sati.

He talked a little, very quietly of trivial things, sometimes to her, sometimes to the others, and Ruth took courage from his calmness. Only as the party grew more gay it seemed to her that under all the sparkle and the gaiety there was a silence louder than the noise, like the heavy hush that falls on nature before the thunder clap and the revealing flash have ushered in a storm. So strong was this sense of waiting that when their host stood with upraised glass, her hand instinctively went out and rested for a brief second on Professor Pendragon's arm, as if she would shield him. Then she saw Terry looking at her, and remembering what Angela had said to her that afternoon, she quickly withdrew it. There had been no need to touch him, for Pendragon, like the others at the table, turned his attention to John Peyton-Russell, listening to his words as if they held no especial significance for him.

"I want John to make the announcement," Angela had said. "It gives him such pleasure to make speeches. He simply adores it."

Evidently she knew her husband's tastes, for with the halting words and awkward phraseology of the man accustomed to addressing nothing gayer than a board of directors' meeting, he stumbled at great

length and with obvious self-satisfaction through a speech in which he proposed that they drink to the approaching marriage of Gloria Mayfield and Prince Aglipogue.

His words were greeted with enthusiasm by all those to whom they meant nothing except that a more or less famous actress was to marry a fat foreign prince. Ruth heard a woman near her whisper to the man at her right:

"Will this make her third or her fourth?"

And the response:

"I've lost count."

The Prince was responding now—something stilted and elaborate, but Ruth did not hear. The dinner had become a nightmare. She wanted to escape. Concealed in the girdle of her frock was the little revolver that Terry had given her. She could feel its weight, and it comforted her.

Somehow the dinner ended and Ruth with the others followed Angela to a drawing-room that had been denuded of rugs for dancing. A few months before Ruth would have thought all these people charming, the women beautiful, the men distinguished. Now they were repulsive to her. How could they listen unprotesting to the announcement that Gloria, the beautiful and good (no power on earth could have persuaded Ruth that Gloria was not good), was to marry an ugly ogre like Prince Aglipogue?

His fat face wreathed in smiles now, he stood,

tucking his violin under his third chin, and then he played—he played, and even Ruth forgot the source of the music. It was not Prince Aglipoque that played, but some slender, dark Hungarian gypsy whose music was addressed to an unattainable princess, 'neath whose window he stood, bathed in moonlight. She threw a rose to him and he crushed it against a heart that broke with joyous pain of loving.

Some little time he played before any one danced; then the insensate callousness of people who "must be amused" triumphed over the music and the stupid gyrations of the modern dance which every one had been forced to learn in self-protection—for those who do not dance must watch, and the insult to the eyes is too great to be borne.

Perhaps after all the music of Aglipogue's violin did move them; perhaps it was only that they had dined too well; perhaps because the company was so small that twice men found themselves dancing with their own wives; for any, or all, or none of these reasons, they tired of dancing early and were ready for Angela's much-advertised "show."

Terry had been dancing with Ruth, and she knew that there was something that he wanted to say to her. She guessed that it was something about Gloria, but she did not want to talk to Terry about Gloria. He could not understand and she regretted that she had tried to make him understand. She could not discuss Gloria with any one, not even

Terry. She knew what she had to do and her whole mind was set on that. If she talked to Terry his lack of faith would weaken her purpose. She left him now, abruptly, ignoring the look of reproach in his eyes, and walked beside Professor Pendragon, who was moving slowly on his crutches, a little behind the others. She meant to stay close beside him through the rest of the night.

In the room that had been the scene of the children's party that afternoon a stage had been put up—a low platform covered with a black velvet carpet and divided in half by a black curtain on which the signs of the Zodiac were embroidered in gold thread. The Christmas tree was still in the room, but unlighted and shoved away into an obscure corner. To Ruth it looked pitiful, like an old man, Father Christmas perhaps, who sat back watching with sorrowful eyes the unchristmas-like amusements of modern humanity. There was a piano on the stage. For a woman who was herself "unmusical," Angela had more pianos in her house than any one in the world, Ruth decided.

In a semicircle, very close to the stage, chairs had been placed, and here the company seated themselves, with much more or less witty comment about what they might expect from behind the mysterious curtain. Behind them was another row of chairs, which, carrying out Mr. Peyton-Russell's "lord of the manor" pose, the household servants had been invited to occupy. They came, with quiet curiosity,

one or two of the maids stifling yawns that led Ruth to suspect they would much rather have gone to bed.

The semi-circular arrangement of the chairs made those at the ends of the row much closer to the stage than those in the centre. On one of these end chairs sat Professor Pendragon, his crutches resting beside him on the floor, and next to him sat Ruth. Then came some of the dinner guests, the other house guests, including Gloria and Prince Aglipogue, being at the farther end of the row; the room was dimly lighted and the stage itself had only one light, a ghostly green lamp, seemingly suspended in the middle of the black curtain, in the shape of a waning moon. Instinctively voices were hushed and people talked to each other in whispers. Only Ruth and Professor Pendragon did not speak. She could not know of what he was thinking, but she knew that in herself thought was suspended. She sat watching her hand clasping the tiny revolver concealed in her girdle.

John Peyton-Russell then announced that Miss Gilchrist (if she had a Christian name no one ever heard it) had consented to recite some of her own poems. The relaxation of the company, almost visible, was half disappointment, half relief. The stage set had led them to expect something unusual, and they were only going to be bored.

Miss Gilchrist seated herself at the piano, on which she accompanied herself. Ruth did not know

if her words were as bad as her music, for she did not understand them, and from certain whispered comments she knew that no one else did, with the possible exception of Miss Gilchrist herself.

Some one else—a pretty, blond young thing with a "parlour voice," sang an old English Christmas carol that sounded like sacrilege. Then Prince Aglipogue sang. Ruth never hated him so much as when he sang because then as at no other time he created the illusion of an understanding soul. His painting was obvious trickery; his violin playing of a quality that did not discredit the composer, for he had been trained to a parrot-like perfection; but when he sang he created the illusion of greatness—Purcell, Brahms, Richard Strauss—it did not matter whose music he sang; one felt that he understood, and it angered Ruth that when she closed her eyes she forgot the singer and could understand how Gloria might marry and even love the possessor of this voice.

Aglipogue always maintained that the war had ruined his career. He had an opera engagement in Germany in 1914, and when the war came he could not go to fill it. So he had remained in the States, and his amazing versatility had enabled him to earn a living as an artist. Now the end of the war had opened new opportunities and he was going to South America in concert work. Ruth had never quite believed his boasting. She did not think that any man's work could be bigger than himself—that any artist

could express something bigger than that contained in his own soul; and the soul of Prince Aglipogue was a weak, cowardly, hateful thing. Yet his voice moved her, attracted and repelled, cast a spell over her, exotic, fascinating, yet sinister as if the music were only a prelude to the wicked necromancy of the Hindoo that was to follow.

The voice ceased, and Prince Aglipogue, alone of all the company unmoved by his own voice, resumed his place at Gloria's side. For a brief breathing minute no one moved. John Peyton-Russell seemed to have forgotten his cue. Then he rose and told them that ^{the} real surprise was to come, an exhibition of magic by Karkotaka, a famous Indian Mahatma. It was the first time that Ruth had ever heard George's Hindoo name and she suspected that it was no more his real name than was George. She thought she remembered an Indian story in which a certain Karkotaka figured as king of the serpents, a sort of demi-god.

All eyes were on the dark curtain now, but if they expected it to rise or to be drawn aside they were disappointed. Instead, it parted silently and Karkotaka, George, glided through, dressed not in the costume of a Brahman, but of a mediæval prince of India. Instead of a turban he wore a high jewelled headdress. A single piece of cloth, dark blue in colour and gemmed with small gold stars, was draped about him, leaving one arm and shoulder bare, and descending to his feet, which were encased in jewelled

sandals. Even Ruth, who had expected something extraordinary, gasped as he stood bowing before them. The dignity that had shown even through his servant's dress was now one hundred times more apparent. He moved with a lithe grace as became the king of the serpents, slowly moving his bare bronze arms until it seemed to Ruth they coiled and writhed like living snakes. Under his headdress his eyes gleamed more brightly than the jewels above.

He had come upon the stage with nothing in his hands, and except for the piano it was empty, certainly empty of all the paraphernalia of legerdemain. Then, suddenly he held in his hand a small brass bowl. He made a sign to some one in the back of the room, who had evidently been detailed to help him, and a servant gave him a carafe of ice water. This he set down beside the bowl. Then he offered the bowl to the spectators for examination. Ruth noticed that he was so close to them that it was not even necessary to step down from the low stage. Two or three men who "Never saw a trick yet I couldn't see through" examined the bowl with sceptical eyes and pronounced it quite ordinary. Then George poured ice water from the carafe into the bowl and again offered it for inspection. Several people touched it with their hands and pronounced the water with which it was quite filled to be ice cold. Then George set the bowl down before him and covered it with a small silk handkerchief. He

waved his hands over it three times, removed the handkerchief, and they saw steam rising from the ice water. Again George offered the bowl for inspection. Terry dipped his fingers into the water and as quickly removed them with an exclamation of pain. The water was almost too hot to touch.

Then from nowhere appeared the little mound of sand and watering pot indispensable to any self-respecting Indian fakir. Several people whispered, "The mango tree—that's an old one." Throughout George had not spoken one word. He seemed to be unconscious of his audience except when he asked them to examine something. To Ruth there seemed in his studied leisure a conscious effort to disguise haste. He bent now over the sand, pouring water on it and pressing it up into a little hillock of mud; then he covered it with a cloth, beneath which his hands were still busy. Then he moved away and seemed to be muttering charms. When he returned and removed the cloth there was the little mango sprout with its two leathery leaves. Again the plant was covered, next time to appear several inches tall with more leaves, and so on until it had reached a height of more than a foot.

It was all very wonderful, as was also the fountain of water that sprang from the tip of his index finger, until he seemed to chide it, whereupon it disappeared from his hand and was seen spouting from the top of the piano. Dissatisfied, he lit a candle and, calling to the water, made it spring

from the candle flame itself. Then he called again, spread out his arms, and the stream, leaving the still lighted candle, separated and sprang from his five outspread fingertips.

In an ordinary music hall the people who watched would doubtless have conceded that it was clever, but here in an ordinary drawing-room in an ordinary country house in the Berkshires on Christmas Eve, the performance became something more than legerdemain. It bordered on the supernatural and they sat silent and fascinated.

Suddenly with an annoyed gesture he threw up his hands, apparently throwing off the water, which instantaneously began to flow in myriad streams from his headdress, reminding Ruth of Shiva, who, with his hair, separated the flow of the sacred river when it came down from the Himalayas. George removed his headdress, disclosing a close white turban beneath, and the flow of the fountain died as unceremoniously as it had begun.

The servant who was standing nearby waiting for his signal now handed George an ordinary walking stick, which George silently offered for inspection. After some examination it was agreed that it was a very ordinary walking stick indeed. George whirled it about his head and dropped it before his feet—it was a writhing snake. Several women screamed. Fountains were pretty, but they were in no mood for snakes. George picked up the snake again and whirled it around his head. It was an

ordinary walking stick, though the men hesitated to re-examine it for proof.

George balanced the stick on his finger, holding his arm out straight before him, and it began to writhe and twist, a snake with open, hissing mouth and darting tongue. He dropped it—the same women screamed again, then laughed hysterically as they saw the common piece of wood before them.

"This sort of thing is all very well from a distance, but I don't really care for snakes at such close quarters," Ruth heard some one whisper.

Ruth glanced at Professor Pendragon beside her, but his eyes were fixed on George. There was an eager light in his eyes as if he, too, were waiting, and his firm set lips were curved in a smile. Again her hand sought Terry's gift. If all these people here were the victims of hypnotic illusions, she at least must keep one corner of her brain free and untouched. Pendragon's presence there was proof that he had decided to fight, and she must help him. In the semi-darkness of the room she could not see Gloria, but she heard her laughter like thin bells over snow-covered hills—it seemed to echo round the room, and she fancied that George, bending over the task of clearing away the things with which he had been working, winced as he heard it, as if the frost of her mirth had bitten into his heart.

The stage was all clear again now, and he bowed deeply before them three times. There was a restless movement among the watchers. Perhaps they

thought this was the end, but Ruth waited, her heart high up in her throat and standing still with fear that she would somehow fail to do the thing she had decided upon.

George moved slowly backward toward the curtain and parted it with his two hands, still facing them. Then reaching back he grasped a heavy object behind him and dragged it into the centre of the stage, the curtains closing behind him. He stood back now and they could see what looked like a large ebony chest. He knelt before it, and Ruth could see that there was more of reverence than utility in his attitude, as he lifted the deep lid that seemed to divide the chest in half. Before her eyes she saw forming the altar she had twice seen before. The side of the lifted top made a wide platform. It was there that *It* would lie. From a compartment in the lifted half he took an antique lamp, which he set on what now looked like the base of the altar. Ruth had removed the revolver from her girdle—the cold metal saved her from screaming aloud as George lit the lamp—a pale blue flame from which, on the instant, heavy, odorous spirals of smoke began to rise, filling the silent room with the insidious perfume of idolatry. For a moment the smoke seemed to blind her eyes. Then she saw—

CHAPTER XVII

ASIGH, more like a gasp, ran through the room—from nowhere apparently, by some trick of slight of hand, by some optical illusion, by some power of hypnosis, they all saw a huge snake coiled on top of what had been an ebony chest, but was now an altar, and before it knelt a priest whose last incarnation had surely been thousands of years before kind Buddha came to bless or curse the world with his doctrine of annihilation.

Then for the first time Karkotaka moved his lips in audible speech—swaying on his knees before the altar, he chanted what no one could doubt was a hymn of praise and supplication to the snake that lay coiled inert above the lamp. For some moments he chanted while they waited with held breath, fascinated, repelled, frightened, for once in their sophisticated lives, into silence.

Then the coiled mass began to move—its head was raised and they could see its cold, glittering eyes; it seemed to be swaying as Karkotaka swayed in time to the chant. The clouds of incense grew thicker and they could scarcely see each other's faces had they looked, but their eyes were held by the tableau on the stage, the kneeling, swaying, chanting priest and the reptile that swayed in response. Ever

higher and higher reared the evil head, swaying always further and further toward the end of the semi-circle at which Ruth and Pendragon were sitting. Ruth sensed his presence at her side and knew the tenseness of his waiting, but she dared not turn her eyes toward him for one moment. Higher and higher rose the chant until with a swift movement and a shout Karkotaka stood upon his feet. In the same moment the snake reared to its full height, hissing with open mouth toward them. In that instant Ruth shot. In the confusion she was conscious of thinking that she must have hit the snake right between the eyes, for it fell to the floor with scarcely a movement, and George stood, staring stupidly down at it. Every one was on their feet—every one speaking at once, though she could not understand what they said. She could only stare at the revolver in her hand. It all happened in such a swift moment—then her head was clear—Gloria had fainted—they were trying to give her air. Some one of the bewildered, frightened servants turned on the lights. Professor Pendragon strode past her, and though Ruth saw the smoking revolver in his hand, it carried no message to her brain. Thrusting aside Prince Aglipogue, who was kneeling futilely over Gloria, he picked her up in his arms and carried her out, and in the general excitement no one thought to wonder at his miraculous cure. Angela had followed Pendragon, but Ruth with the others stood gazing at the horrible enchantment.

"Who did it?—who shot the thing?" she heard some one ask.

"I did." She held up her revolver. "I killed it."

"Let me see." It was Terry standing beside her. He took the revolver from her hands.

"Sorry, Ruth, but I'm afraid you didn't. It was Pendragon. I was watching him and saw him aim and fire. It was a splendid shot even for an expert and at such short range, for the filthy brute was moving and he hit it right between the eyes. You see, child—" he opened the revolver for her to look—"there hasn't been a single shot fired from your gun."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

And then, though she had never done anything so mid-Victorian in her life before, she swayed and for the smallest fraction of a second lost consciousness, then woke to the realization that Terry was supporting her and straightened up with protestations that she was all right.

"But why did you, why did he do it? We were going to see something quite wonderful—I think the Indian snake dances are—"

It was Miss Gilchrist, but no one had to answer her, for Mr. Peyton-Russell came in just then to tell them that Miss Mayfield was quite all right.

"Angela's going to stay with her for a while, but if any of you don't feel that your nerves are quite ready for bed, come on down to the billiard

room. There's a little drink—real, old-fashioned hot Scotch, waiting for you."

He was trying hard to be the imperturbable jovial host and perhaps he succeeded for there was a general exodus, Terry looked questioningly at Ruth.

She shook her head. She wanted above everything to get away from them. They would sit over their drinks and gossip discreetly—discuss George, why Pendragon had killed the snake, his sudden return to health, his usurpation of Aglipogue's place at Gloria's side. She had not killed the snake but she had gone through all the nervous strain of preparing to kill it—of thinking she had killed it and she was very tired.

Terry walked with her as far as the staircase.

"Tomorow," he said, but she did not know what he meant. Yet she slept that night. She was in that state of weariness mental and physical in which one stretches out like a cat, feeling the cool, clean linen like a caress and thanking God for the greatest blessing in all this tired world—sleep.

She woke late with a sense of happiness and relief even before she was sufficiently conscious to remember the events of the past night. It was a wonderful Christmas day—sunshiny and bright. She lay quietly thinking, looking at the holly wreaths at her windows and watching some snow birds on her sill. She wished lazily that she had

some crumbs to feed them. She felt very young, almost like a child. It would be nice to be a child again, to get up and explore the contents of a stocking hung before the chimney place in the living-room of a Middle West home. She thought of her mother, as one inevitably thinks of the dead on days of home gathering, and soft tears filled her eyes.

She answered a discreet knock on the door and a maid entered with a tray. It was the gossipy maid of her first day. How she knew that she was awake Ruth could not guess.

"I thought you'd rather have breakfast in bed this morning, Miss," and then as an afterthought, "Merry Christmas, Miss."

"Merry Christmas— It is a Merry Christmas after all, and I would like breakfast in bed, though it makes me feel awfully lazy. How did you think of it?"

"The mistress left orders last night, but I'd thought of it anyway—after what we all went through last night—"

She shook her head and compressed her lips solemnly. Ruth looked at her, willing to be interested in anything or anybody. She could not have been much older than Ruth herself, but hard work and a coiffure composed of much false hair surmounted by a preposterously small maid's cap, made her seem much more mature. As Ruth did not answer she went on:

"Such goings on—it's a wonder we're all alive to tell of it."

"Then you didn't like the show?" asked Ruth.

"Such things ain't Christian, especially on the Lord's birthday. Tell me, Miss, was it you killed it—some said it was you and some said it was the poor paralysed gentleman, who was cured so miraculous like."

"It was Professor Pendragon. Have you seen him today?"

"Indeed, we've all seen him. He's walking round all over the place, and he's give ev-er-ey servant in the house a five dollar gold piece!"

This amazing piece of information gave Ruth a shock. In her selfish absorption in Gloria and herself she hadn't thought of the servants and the inevitable toll of Christmas gifts.

"Do you know, Jennie, I didn't buy any gifts before I came up here and I almost forgot, but I want to give you a present—" She was just about to offer money, and then something in the kind, stolid face warned her that this would be wrong. "I'd like to give you something of my own that you like. If you'll just tell me what you want you can have anything of mine—any dress or hat or—well, just anything you like."

The girl's eyes spread wide.

"Anything?"

"Yes, anything, that is, if I have anything you like. If not I'll have to follow Professor Pen-

dragon's example and give you money to buy your own gift."

"You've got such lots of pretty clothes—"

Ruth thought her wardrobe very limited, but waited.

"There is one dress—not a party dress—I've always wanted one—there ain't any place to wear it, but if you could—do you really mean it—anything?"

"Of course," said Ruth, expecting a request for one of her three presentable evening gowns.

"Then I'd like that blue silk thing with the lots of lace—the thing you wear here in your own room."

She pointed to a negligée thrown over a chair by the dressing-table.

"Take it; it will make me very happy to know that you have it." She tried to visualize Jennie in the negligée, but the picture was not funny. She turned her head away so that Jennie should not see the tears in her eyes.

"You'll most likely be getting a lot of things yourself, Miss; a man's gone down to the village for the mail. You'll be getting a lot of things from the city."

"I'm afraid not; still I may get some letters which will be welcome."

"I'll go down and see—he may be back. He went early."

She was back in an incredibly short space of

minutes bearing one letter, from Dorothy Winslow.

"And Miss Mayfield wants to know if you'll come to her room when you're dressed," said Jennie, who, seeing that Ruth was going to read her letter, left her with another hurried, awkward "thank you, Miss," delivered through the door as she hurried off with her blue silk prize.

Dorothy's Christmas letter fairly bubbled over with happiness, and with an affection for Ruth which she had never suspected.

"It seems ages since you went away," she wrote, "and I'm just dying to tell you everything—how Nels was awfully humble and admitted he's been a perfect silly over that imitation high siren, and then he was jealous—furiously jealous over your roses. It was hard not to tell him the truth, but I didn't—not until afterward, when he asked me to marry him. Yes, he did! And we've done it. Neither of us had any money, but that didn't really make any difference. He's always been able to buy his own cigarettes and so have I and there's no reason why we can't do it together just as well as apart. We've got the funniest little apartment on Thirty-fourth Street—just a room with an alcove and a bath and a kitchenette. Nels is going to get another place to work—one room some place—very business-like and all that sort of thing and I'll work at home. But please do hurry back and have dinner with us sometime. You'll see! I *can* cook. But I

must work, too, else Nels will get ever so many leagues ahead of me. And please have you delivered my message to the Dragon? You did give him Nels' message I know for Nels heard from him and that man with the double name who is so splendidly entertaining you over the holidays is going to buy the picture. You must get back in time for the party we'll put on to celebrate when the check comes. You know I feel that you made it all happen."

She chatted on over ten pages of art school gossip that made Ruth rather homesick, and eager to get back to New York, especially as the first object of her visit had been accomplished. But had it been accomplished? The snake was killed and Professor Pendragon was cured. To her the connection seemed obvious. Professor Pendragon had been cured because the object of George's faith had been destroyed and with it the mind-born malady which, through faith, he had put upon the man who was his rival. But this did not accomplish all of Ruth's desire. There still remained the Prince. Even though George's power over Pendragon had been destroyed, might he not still exercise the same influence over Gloria? And would George calmly submit to the insult that had been put upon him? Her whole trust was now in Pendragon. He had shown that he could fight. Having gone so far he must go further and drive away Prince Aglipogue. Then every one would be happy—that is, every one

except herself and Terry. She was no longer sure that Terry loved Gloria. Probably he had loved her because no man could be indifferent to Gloria, but perhaps he had resigned himself to the unromantic rôle of friend. He had suspected her of being interested in Pendragon for herself. That might mean anything—his thought might have been fathered by the hope that some one would remove Pendragon, one of his own rivals; or perhaps she had betrayed her love for him and he wanted to turn her attention toward another object, or perhaps—but men were such curious creatures and who could tell? At least he did not love her which was all that really mattered now. Nels and Dorothy could go working and playing together through the future, but she must content herself to be wedded for life to her art; and such art—newspaper cartoons!

While she thought she was dressing, for she was really very curious to see Gloria and hear what she had to say. The door of Gloria's room was half open and Ruth knocked and went inside at the same moment. Gloria was fully dressed and seemed to be in the midst of packing. There were dark circles under her eyes as if she had not slept.

"Ruth, I want you to do something for me," was her abrupt greeting.

Ruth waited for an explanation.

"Will you?"

"Of course, Gloria,—anything."

"I believe you would at that—you're an awfully nice child; sometimes I suspect that you're older than I am; but this is something rather nasty, so don't be too sure that you'll want to do it. I want you to tell Aggie that I can't marry him—that I must have been insane when I said I would, that the whole thing is utterly impossible—that it would please me if he would go back to New York at once. I don't want to see him any more."

Ruth struggled to conceal her joy at this announcement.

"Don't you think, Gloria, that it would be more effective if you told him yourself?"

"No; and besides I don't want to see the brute—he—he—Oh, I can't bear to look at him—to remember everything—"

"Suppose he doesn't believe me?"

"He will."

"You could write a note."

"Then he wouldn't believe; a note would be too gentle. He'd want to see me and talk, but if you tell him he'll know that it's final or I wouldn't have chosen to tell him through a third person. Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"I was going to leave myself," explained Gloria with a wave of her hand toward the evidences of packing. "But I can't. George has disappeared—absolutely disappeared—"

"When—where?"

"I said disappeared; that doesn't mean he left a forwarding address. He slipped off into the nowhere, sometime between midnight and morning and of course I can't move until we hear from him."

"You can, too!" Ruth was intense in her excitement. "You can—you've given up the Prince; the next thing is to give up George. He's been the cause of all your troubles. I know you don't believe it, but he has—he's hypnotized you—and if he's disappeared you ought to be glad of it."

Gloria looked at her curiously from between half-closed lids.

"Why do you think I won't believe you? I don't believe or disbelieve, I know that I have been hypnotized, or mad, or ill—something. I woke up this morning quite new—Perhaps it's religion—" She laughed with something of her old careless mirth. "Anyway I'm quite sane now, and I do want to get back to New York so that I can begin rehearsals in Terry's new play. I feel like working hard, like beginning all over again—I feel—so—so free, that's the word, as if I had been in prison—a prison with mirror walls, every one of which reflected a distorted vision of myself. That's all I could see—myself, always myself and always wrong."

"May I come in?"

It was Angela at the still half-open door.

"Why, you're not leaving?"

"No; I only thought I was. Changed my mind again."

"And you're quite well. The poor, dear Prince has been quite frantic. He's so anxious to see you for himself before he will be assured that you're really all right, after the shock last night. He's waiting for you now. The other men have gone off on a hike through the snow. John has such a passion for exercise—afraid of getting stout, though he won't admit it. I told the Prince that I would try and send you down to him."

"I can't go now. Ruth will go down and talk to him."

"Ruth? But he wants you."

A sign from Gloria counselled Ruth to go now before the discussion, and she slipped out unnoticed by Angela whose blue eyes were fixed on Gloria, awaiting explanations.

Prince Aglipogue was not difficult to find. She could hear his heavy pacing before she had reached the bottom of the stairs. He stopped abruptly when he saw her approaching, waving his cigarette frantically with one hand while he twisted his moustache with the other.

"Gloria, Miss Mayfield, she is well; you have news from her? She is coming down?"

"Miss Mayfield is well, but she is not coming down just now. She wants to be alone, but she sent me—"

It was impossible to tell him. Much as she hated

the man she did not quite have the courage to deliver Gloria's message without preliminaries.

"Yes? Yes?—speak, tell me; she is ill, is it not?"

There was a nervous apprehension in his voice and manner that made Ruth suspect that the news would not be altogether unexpected.

"No; she is not ill. As I said she is quite well, but she asked me to say—to tell you—it's awfully hard to say it, but she asked me to tell you that she cannot marry you and that it would be very tactful if you would go back to New York at once without trying to see her."

It was blunderingly done, but she could think of no other way to tell it. Unwelcome truths are only made more ugly by any effort to soften their harshness.

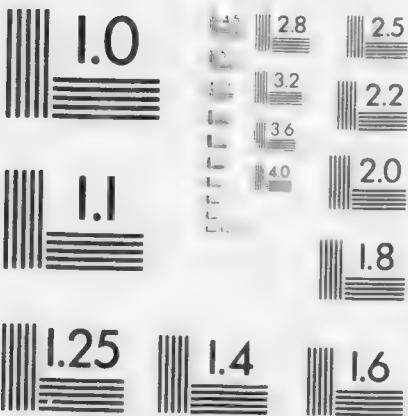
His cigarette dropped unnoticed upon the rug and his jaw dropped in a stupid way that made him look like a great pig. One part of Ruth's brain was really sorry for him, for he had doubtless been fond of Gloria in his own way; the other half of her brain wanted to laugh, but she only stood with bent head, as if, having struck him she was waiting for his retaliation. It came with a rush as soon as he had assimilated the full meaning of her words:

"I do not believe—it is a plot—she would not send a message such as that to me—it is the work of that Riordan—He is jealous—I will sue her for breach of promise—one can do that, is it not?"



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



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Microcopy Resolution Test Chart
ANSI and ISO Test Chart No. 2
1.0 1.1 1.25 1.4 1.6 1.8 2.0 2.2 2.5 2.8

"Women sometimes sue men for breach of promise," said Ruth, who was quite calm now, "but men seldom sue women; besides, you can't sue Gloria, because she has no money."

"No money?" He laughed and lit another cigarette to give point to his carelessness and unbelief.

"You say she has no money? With a house on Gramercy Park, she is poor?"

Behind his words and his nonchalant air Ruth caught the uneasiness in his small eyes and knew that she had struck the right note.

"It is true that she has a house on Gramercy Square, but it takes her entire income to pay the taxes. She got the house from her second husband; the third was more careful. He only gave her a small income, which, of course, she loses when she remarries."

For a moment he stared at her incredulous, but there was nothing but honesty in her face.

"It is the truth, you are speaking? Come, let us sit and talk—here a cigarette? No? You do not smoke? I had forgotten. We have not been such friends as I might have desired. Now explain—Miss Mayfield wishes to break her engagement with me?"

"She has broken it," said Ruth tersely.

"It is, you can understand, a shock of the greatest—I loved—but no matter—tell me again of the affairs financial of Miss Mayfield. As a friend only

—I am resigned—as a friend only I am interested."

She looked at him, his heavy body, his fat face, his oily brown eyes, and was tempted to tell him the truth of what she thought. He laid one fat hand on hers with a familiar gesture and involuntarily she drew back as if something unclean had touched her. He saw but pretended not to see. He had an object to achieve and could not afford to be sensitive. She understood and thought it all out before she spoke. If she followed her impulse he would cause trouble, or annoyance to Gloria at the least. If she told him the truth he would believe her and would go away without further urging. Evidently he had thought that Gloria had money, and Gloria, to whom money meant nothing, had never thought to tell him anything of her affairs. It was a repulsive task but Ruth decided to give him the information he wanted.

"You must understand," she said, "that Gloria is merely a professional woman, an actress, not an heiress. She has no money except what she earns. One of her husbands gave her the house on Gramercy Park. A year later she married again and when she was divorced from her last husband he settled on her a small income—hardly sufficient to keep up the house when she is not working. If she marries again she loses even that."

She rose to leave him, having finished with her mission, but he caught her hand.

"You are speaking the truth, Miss Ruth?"

She drew away her hand without answering.

"But you? Perhaps you have been helping her?"

"I have even less than Gloria."

His amazing lack of finesse—his appalling vulgarity stunned her into making a reply.

"There is a train in the morning—"

"There is one this afternoon that you can catch if you will hurry. I advise you to take it."

"Thank you, I will—you have saved me a great deal of annoyance. I am grateful—if—"

But Ruth did not wait for the end of his remarks. She could not bear to look at him for another second. He was even worse than she had supposed. Evidently he had not cared for Gloria at all, and she had always conceded to him that much—that Gloria had touched some one small bit of fineness in his sordid nature.

She dared not return to Gloria just then, for she knew that Gloria in her usual frank manner had doubtless told Angela of her changed plans; even now Angela might be protesting with her and urging her not to dispose of a real title so carelessly. Even without the title Angela would not approve of the broken engagement, for it had been announced in her house; therefore, she had, in a way, been sponsor for it, and would want to see it go through to a successful conclusion.

She made her way to the enclosed veranda

where she had kept her rendezvous with Pendragon on the afternoon of her arrival. It was quite deserted now, but far out on the crest of one of the near hills she saw a moving, black splotch against the snow that as she watched gradually resolved itself into three figures—John Peyton-Russell, Terry and Professor Pendragon. It gave her a strange thrill to see them thus—Pendragon striding along with the rest. Surely this was a miracle—a Christmas miracle, and she remembered a sentence in an old book of witchcraft that she had once read:

“Verily there be magic both black and white, but of these two, the white magic prevaileth ever over the black.”

CHAPTER XVIII

RUTH did not see Gloria until just before luncheon.

"I told him, and he's going," she said.

"Did he make much of a row?"

"Not after I explained that you hadn't any money."

"Let's not talk about him any more—only has he gone yet?"

"Yes; he wouldn't even wait until train time. Said he could get luncheon in the village and started out as soon as he could pack. I'm so happy about it—now you can marry Professor Pendragon again."

She realized at once that she shouldn't have said it, but she had left so much unsaid during the last few weeks and now with both George and Prince Aglipogue gone she felt that the seal had been removed from her lips. She felt too, in a curious way, that Gloria though so many years older, was in a way her special charge—that she was entering a new life and must be guided.

Gloria looked at her with startled eyes.

"What nonsense! You're too romantic, Ruth!"

"But, Gloria, you do love him; you can't deny it.

Didn't you tell me once that he is the only one you've ever really loved?"

"It takes two to make a marriage, Ruth."

"But he loves you too."

"What makes you think that?"

"He told me so."

"Even so, and even if I would marry again, you must realize that men very rarely marry the women they love. That's why we separated, I think. We married for love and that is always disastrous. I should never have married at all. Tomorrow we'll go back to town and Percy and I will each go our separate ways and forget the horrible nightmare of this place. It was just chance that we met—a weird freak of coincidence. He didn't want it; neither did I."

There was nothing that Ruth could answer and presently Gloria went on:

"No woman was meant to have both a career and a husband; lots of them try it—most women in fact, but usually they come to grief. It isn't written in the stars that one woman should have both loves, art and a husband."

Ruth thought of Nels and Dorothy. Would they come to grief she wondered. As for herself she didn't have to choose—love didn't come and art had turned its back on her. She wondered if it was written in the stars that she should have neither art nor love. Then she remembered Pendragon's quotation, "The stars incline, but do not compel." So

many things had happened here perhaps another miracle would be performed. She wondered why Gloria said nothing about Pendragon's sudden recovery.

It was a relief not to see Prince Aglipoque at the luncheon table. The dinner guests of the night before had all returned to their own homes. Aglipogue was gone, and Ruth wondered if Angela would be troubled, because, for once, there was an uneven number of people at the table. She did look a bit troubled, though she was trying hard to conceal it. An engagement announced and broken within twenty-four hours was rather trying. Still she was smiling:

"We've got news of your servant, Gloria dear,—rather horrid news. It's quite a shock —a bad way to end a pleasant Christmas party, even though he was only a servant, and not a very good one." She paused, but no one came to her rescue with questions or information and she went on:

"They found him in the snow—he must have tried to walk to the station and got lost—he was dead—frozen—and he had the—that horrible beast with him—the dead snake wound round his body."

Her voice broke hysterically and she shivered with horror.

"They didn't bring him here—thank God—but took him to an undertaker's in the village. If he has any relatives that you could wire—"

"None that I know of—they wouldn't be in America anyway," said Gloria, quite calmly, though her face was pale.

"Then Terry said he'd arrange things, you know—one place is as good as another. I'm glad you take it so quietly—it's an awful ending."

"He must have been furious because Pendragon shot the snake," said Terry.

"Still, if the excitement of killing a snake could cure Pen, Miss Mayfield ought to be willing to sacrifice her servant," said John Peyton-Russell.

"It really was remarkable—though I have heard of similar instances—of paralytics leaving their beds during the excitement of a fire, and that sort of thing—I trust there will be no relapse."

Miss Gilchrist's tone left no doubt in the minds of her hearers that she was prepared for the worst. Indeed, her eyes were constantly fastened on Professor Pendragon as if she expected him to fall down at any minute.

"There will be none, thank you," said Pendragon.

Ruth and Terry exchanged glances. Ruth's eyes asked Terry, "Do you believe me now?" and Terry's answered, "I don't know—I don't understand it at all."

"Of course we're all very happy over Professor Pendragon's recovery," said Gloria in her most conventional voice, "and of course I don't really feel

any loss about George, though I am sorry he died that way."

"It is tragic, but now he's really gone, Gloria," said Terry. "I'm awfully glad to be rid of him. He was the most disagreeable servant I ever met, if one can be said to meet servants. I don't think George ever really accepted me. He used to snub me most horribly and I don't like being snubbed."

"That reminds me that you haven't any servant at all, Gloria, so you really must stay here a few days longer. Perhaps I can find some for you—she really can't go back now, can she, John?"

"Really, Angela, that's unfair; of course I want Miss Mayfield to stay—we planned to have everybody over the New Year. Perhaps Professor Pendragon can persuade her."

"I have had little luck in persuading women to do anything—if Prince Aglipogue had not left us so suddenly he might have been more successful."

There was a little embarrassed silence around the table after Pendragon had spoken, then Angela began talking of some irrelevant subject and the conversation went on, but always Ruth observed that neither Gloria nor Pendragon ever spoke directly to each other, though the omission was so cleverly disguised that no one at the table observed it except Terry and Ruth who always seemed to see everything together. Ruth had been so busy with Gloria and her affairs that she had talked very little to Terry and never alone; but they conversed neverthe-

less, constantly reading each other's eyes as clearly as they would a printed page. The same things seemed to amuse them both and except in the realm of mystery which Ruth's childhood had built about her, they understood each other perfectly. She knew now that he wanted to talk to her, but she pretended not to see, for having begun her task of managing the happiness of Gloria, she was determined to go on, and the person she wanted to see alone was Professor Pendragon.

Angela who always advertised her house as "one of those places where you can do exactly what you please," and therefore never on any occasion let any one do as they pleased if she could possibly prevent it by a continuous program of "amusement" and "entertainment," was trying to interest them in a plan to go skating that evening by moonlight on a little lake that lay halfway between Fir Tree Farm and the village. Some one had reported that the ice was clear of snow and what was the good of being in the country in winter time if one didn't go in for winter sport?

Her plans fell on rather unenthusiastic ears. The men, having enjoyed a long hike in the morning, were not eager for more exercise; Gloria wanted to spend the afternoon preparing to leave the next morning; Ruth was not interested in anything that did not seem to offer any furtherance of her plans for Gloria; and Miss Gilchrist didn't skate.

The very atmosphere seemed to say that the party

was finished; that these people had, for the time being, said all they had to say to each other and for the time, and wanted to be gone along their several roads. It is a wise hostess who recognizes this situation and apparently Angela did recognize it, for she finally stopped urging her scheme and when Gloria asked Ruth to help her pack—Gloria always went on a week-end equipped as for trans-continental travel—Angela made no effort to detain them or to go with them.

Gloria's moment of confidences had passed. She talked now, but of Terry's play. She had told him of her changed decision and he seemed very happy about it.

"Perhaps you'll have a chance to make sketches of us," she said to Ruth, awakening again Ruth's interest in the work to which she also was returning.

"We'll find two women servants some place and go on as before, Ruth. Except that I'm not going to see quite so many people—only people I really like after this. You know I really love the old house—as near home as anything I'll ever have. Wish we could get Amy back."

"We can," said Ruth. "Amy and I had an agreement when she left that she would come back if you ever got rid of George. I have her address."

"Really, Ruth!" said Gloria, looking at her with genuine admiration, "You are the most amazing

young person I've ever met. You ought to write a book on the care and training of aunts. It would be a great success."

Of this Ruth was not so sure. They were on the morning train and while she had accomplished half her purpose she had not wholly succeeded. Gloria and Pendragon had met and now they were going to part more widely separated than ever before, because their opportunity had come and for some stupid reason they were both letting it go without reaching out a hand or saying one word to make it their own. And Gloria wasn't happy—she was just normal at last, and a normal Gloria was rather a pitiful thing. She was like stale champagne—all the sparkle gone out of her. It seemed to Ruth that she could not live through another meal with Gloria and Pendragon talking across and around each other—Pendragon with his grave, quiet face in which the lines of pain seemed to be set forever—Gloria, changed and quiet, determined to work and succeed again, not for the joy of her work, but because it seemed the right thing to do. Yet she did live through another dinner, a most unhappy meal at which John and Angela sat trying to talk, realizing that something more than they could quite understand had gone wrong and not knowing exactly what to do about it. Terry and Miss Gilchrist relieved the tension somewhat, Terry consciously, Miss Gilchrist unconsciously, because no one else seemed able to talk, drew her out and once

started on modern child training, there was no reason for any one else making any effort. She ran on endlessly with no more encouragement than an occasional, "Oh quite, Really, Yes indeed, or How interesting!" from Terry or Pendragon.

What hurt more than anything was that Terry no longer signalled Ruth with his eyes. There was no longer any interest or invitation in them. If he had had anything to say to her he had forgotten it or lost interest, for now he seemed to avoid exchange of words or glances with her as much as Gloria and Pendragon avoided each other.

There was a feeble attempt on the part of Angela to start a conversation with some semblance of animation over the coffee cups in the library afterward, but finally even she surrendered as one by one they made excuses of weariness, the early train or no excuse at all and drifted away.

Ruth watched for Pendragon's going and followed him. He made his way to the enclosed veranda. She stood a moment looking through the glass door, watching him as he paced up and down, smoking a pipe. What she was going to do required courage; she might only meet with the cold rebuff that is due to meddlesome persons, but Gloria's happiness was at stake and she could only fail, so she walked timidly out to him.

She waited patiently until he turned and faced her. She thought she saw a look of disappointment cross his face when he saw who had interrupted

his solitude. That look, fancied or real, encouraged her to go on.

"I wanted to thank you for doing what you did—for not giving up, and to tell you how happy I am that you're well again," she began.

"Yes—I am well again—I walk and eat and sleep and wake again—I am alive."

"And I wanted to ask you if you're going to stop now—You've saved Gloria from George and from the Prince—are you going to let her go away now that you have accomplished so much?"

"My dear child, I can't kidnap Gloria—she's not the sort of woman one kidnaps—not even the sort one woos and wins. She is the other sort—the only sort worth while I think—the princess who calls her own swayamvara, and makes her own choice."

"But she did choose."

"She has chosen too often."

"Do you mean that even if Gloria still loved you you would not marry her just because she has—because she has—"

All her old ideas and training rose up and kept her from finishing the sentence "because she has had two other husbands."

"If Gloria had married one hundred men I would still want her—don't you understand that?" He spoke almost fiercely. "But you don't understand—you're too young; it isn't that; but Gloria doesn't love me. If she did she would tell me so. She knows that I love her and she has shown very

plainly that she doesn't want my love. I appreciate your kindness," he went on in a calmer tone, "but don't trouble any more—what is written is written and can't be changed no matter how one tries."

"If I give you my word of honour that Gloria does love you, what then? She told me so—she does know that you love her, but she thinks you don't—she thinks the husbands make a difference. She doesn't believe that a man could understand that they were just—just incidents."

Neither laughed at the idea of this twenty-year old girl speaking of two husbands as incidents, though later Ruth remembered it herself, and thought it rather funny.

He did not answer,—he was standing quite rigidly, staring at the door, and, turning, Ruth saw Gloria approaching them:

"I'm sorry; I thought you were alone, Ruth," she said and hesitated as if she would have gone back.

"I've just remembered," said Pendragon, "that the small star Eros is supposed to be visible again about this time, but we have no telescope. Ruth has not found it, though she has young eyes—Perhaps you and I, together, Gloria—if we looked very closely—"

Under the clear starlight she saw them in each other's arms. There was one very bright star, that seemed to hang lower in the sky than winter stars are wont to hang. Surely it was the star of love,

though doubtless no astronomer had ever named it so. She did not know exactly where she was going when she left them there, but she was very happy. And then halfway down the stairs she sat down because her happiness was overflowing from her eyes in tears and she couldn't see, and suddenly she felt very tired. It was there that Terry, ascending, found her.

"I say—what's wrong? You're crying. I saw you with Pendragon—has he done anything to hurt you? I'll—"

"No—it's not that—I'm crying because I'm so happy—"

"Oh!"

He looked at her half-disappointed, half-relieved and wholly bewildered.

"It's Gloria and Pendragon—they've made up." She reverted to the vernacular of childhood. "I'm so happy because they're happy."

"But I thought—I thought you cared for Pendragon," stumbled Terry.

"That's funny—what made you think that? I do like him but mostly for Gloria's sake."

"Look here," said Terry. "If you don't love Pendragon who do you love?"

She was smiling through her tears now.

"Is it absolutely necessary that I should love some one? You know I always thought that you loved Gloria. If you don't love Gloria, whom do you love?"

For a moment he looked down into her upturned face, struggling against the provocation of her lips.

"I love the most charming, youngest, most mature, most unselfish, most winsome—oh, there aren't adjectives enough. Who do you love?"

"The nicest—the very nicest and cleverest man in the world," she answered demurely.

"Nicest—I'm not quite sure that I like that adjective applied to a man."

"I can't help it—we can't all have playwright's vocabularies, you know. I could draw him better."

He bent over very near to her while her clever fingers made rapid strokes. When it was finished she looked up at him with shy daring in her eyes.

"Is my nose really like that?" he asked.

"How did you guess who it was meant for?" she teased, and turned her head quickly, because she was not quite sure even now that she was ready for that wonderful first kiss.

"I've always wanted to kiss you just below that little curl anyway," whispered Terry. "And now your lips, please."

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